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ABSTRACT

"Changing Education" is targeted for Australian teachers and administrators. This theme issue, which the editorial defines as about "The Changing World of Continuing Education," contains eight articles and an editorial about recent developments in adult literacy and basic education (ALBE), vocational education and training, and English as a Second Language (ESL): "The Shifting Boundaries of Adult and Vocational Education" (Jennifer Angwin); "Editorial: Shifting Boundaries: Education beyond the School" (Jennifer Angwin, Lindsay Fitzclarence, Russell Matthews); "Case Studies in Teaching Critical Literacy to Adult NESB [Non-English Speaking Background] Students" (Adrian Fitzgerald et al.); "Back to the Margins? The New Scenario for Adult Literacy and ESL" (Jill Sanguinetti, Christine Riddell); "Needs Analysis in the Adult ESL Classroom" (Jill Banforth); "Adult Education and Training" (Jennifer Angwin, Rod Maclean, Jill Sanguinetti); "Reporting on Student Research into Adult Literacy" (John Hodgens); "ALBE/ESL and the Net" (Bill Daly); "Cultural Narratives of Ageing or How Old Is the Adult in Adult Education?" (Barbara Kamler); and "Adam's Story" (Pamela Bartholomaeus). Daly's article includes a 24-item annotated list of websites useful to ESL and ALBE practitioners. (MN)

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# The Shifting Boundaries of Adult and Vocational Education

*Jennifer Angwin*

**Deakin Centre for Education and Change**

INSIDE

Adult's Story

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In recent times education in Australia has been undergoing a continual process of reconstruction and change. From preschool entitlement and funding to the restructuring of schools and the reorganisation of the TAFE and University sectors, no one working in education today is working in the same way as five to ten years ago. In Victoria alone the closure of over 300 schools and the loss of almost 9000 teachers has resulted in a series of changes to all sectors, the consequences of which are only now being realised. In the secondary sector, teachers are now facing new sets of relationships with TAFE institutes, as increasing numbers of senior secondary students enrol in TAFE certificate courses as part of their final two years of schooling.

The reasons for these changes are complex and can be interpreted from a range of different perspectives. However since the economic depression of the eighties and the rise of unemployment in the community in general and amongst young people in particular, there have been a series of recurring discourses of crisis and fear which have suggested that all the problems in the community can be solved by changing the educational system. The Finn, Mayer and Carmichael Reports into the outcomes of schooling all suggested changes to the educational system in which young people participate. The main changes have been in the redirection of education towards vocational training. For educators there are some major tensions in these competing discourses, but as funding becomes ever more closely tied to outcomes, the possibilities for educators to contest these discourses are diminished.

## Diversity of adult education provision

Unlike the school sector, the field of adult education is incredibly diverse. It is filled with jargon and acronyms exclusive to the field, so that those outside adult education find it difficult to unravel the complex interweaving of policy, provision, funding arrangements, teachers, trainers and curricula. The field includes diverse areas from adult literacy (and numeracy) and basic education (ALBE), to hobby classes such as cooking or painting. There is also the provision of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), from basic communication for migrants and refugees, to English for academic purposes at University level for fee paying overseas students.

The fastest growing sector is Vocational Education and Training (VET), which includes courses run at TAFE, within workplaces and in the community sector. A final sector is the provision of education for people who are unemployed and seek VET courses in order to prepare themselves to attempt to re-enter the workforce. These Labour Market Programs (LMP) expanded rapidly under the Working Nation policy but suffered a severe cut back under the new federal government when $1.8 billion funding was withdrawn from these particular programs and up to $5 billion from the field of post school education in general, over the next three years.

In this wide field of adult education there is a complex mix of public and private provision. The major public provider is the TAFE sector, which in Victoria is administered by the Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE) which has responsibility for both TAFE Institutes and Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) provision. In broad terms TAFE provides VET courses and access programs, to enable disadvantaged groups to gain entry into VET, and ACFE provides a wider range of programs in the community including the Adult Migrant Education Program in Victoria, general education for adults, VCE and vocational programs. The final major public provider is the Council of Adult Education (CAE) which for many years has provided a range of continuing education courses.

As well there is an extensive network of neighbourhood and community houses which provide community based education courses. These community venues have for many years provided access for women to re-enter the education system and to begin to upgrade their skills in a supportive environment, where time was not an imposed limitation to their learning. The ideology of lifelong learning remains the cornerstone of these community education programs, even though this remains under challenge with current funding policies. Community houses have recently moved into the provision of VET programs, particularly under Labour Market Program funding, both through



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demand from unemployed people in the community and also due to funding imperatives, as community based adult education also is experiencing the vocational imperative in Australian education. A second major community resource in more recent times has been the establishment of Skillshare, community based centres providing VET skills on both a formal and informal basis. The Skillshares became community centres for unemployed people, assisting them to gain skills to seek further employment. Unfortunately the Skillshare sector too has been cut under new federal government cut backs and yet another community centred resource might well disappear.

## Changing schools

In the past the boundaries between the sectors of school and post school education were quite distinct. In the secondary sector, for many years there was a separate and distinct secondary system, with both 'Technical' and 'High' schools. The relationships between the sectors were often limited, with teachers rarely moving from one sector to another. It is only in the last twenty years that attention has been paid to the transition of students from one stage to another, thus building closer relationships between the different schools in the local community. Much of the senior secondary curriculum remains geared towards a pathway into university studies, even though it is well known that no more that perhaps twenty-thirty percent of 'school completers' take this academic path, and in some areas these numbers are much lower. The inclusion of vocational options for study in the final two years thus increases the reach of school education for students by a further twenty -thirty percent.

Another rapidly developing project shifting the boundaries between schools and the TAFE sector has been the opening of access to TAFE courses during students' final secondary school years. This development recognises the needs of a large number of young people to move from school into vocational education and training or work rather than follow a straight academic curriculum until Year 12. In some states this project is already well underway, with as many as 60% of senior school students undertaking TAFE units in their final two years of schooling. In other states these links are only in the early stages and will need a great deal more negotiation between school and TAFE institutes to provide a wide range of vocational options for young people.

This blurring of boundaries between school and post school educational provision and organisation, raises a number of interesting issues. In the school sector, even during the final two years, young people are still bound by many rules and regulations which are largely not a part of the post school sector. The ways of relating to students, their rights and responsibilities, the understandings and construction of curricula, the processes of assessment and evaluation all differ between the two sectors. For example, with the introduction of the VCE into Victoria, a complex system of assessment and moderation was put in place. Groups of schools met together to moderate the students achievements across a region. These local level assessment procedures enabled validation of results across wider areas. However, in the VET sector, given the widespread use of competency based curricula with built in assessment processes, these wider means of moderation and assessment are not in place.

Once a student leaves the school sector, the sets of possible educational pathways are far more complex than teachers and students encounter in the school sector. Many students find the transition from a relatively small school group to the much larger campuses of universities and TAFE with up to 30 000 students, quite difficult, and spend much of the first year trying to work out just what is expected of them. The drop out rate of students in their first year of post school studies remains disturbingly high, suggesting that both schools and tertiary institutions need to re-examine the career counselling provided to young people and also the transition into tertiary studies.

But in Australia today there remains a growing number of young people for whom neither TAFE or university is an option. Their post-secondary school educational pathways are not well documented nor, it appears, do they provide useful pathways into employment, which after all remains one of the important functions of schooling. What happens to these young people when at some time they again engage with an educational course? Where do these unemployed young people look for vocational education and training and once they have left the structured pathways into further study, how do they find these pathways themselves?

## Post school provision of VET

The first thing that strikes people about the out of school sector is the diversity of provision, programs, institutions teachers and curricula. Whereas in the school sector, almost all students attend a 'school' as it is commonly understood in the post school sectors increasing numbers of students do not attend institutions which could be characterised by the usual understandings of 'schools'. Indeed many young people do move on to University and TAFE and continue their education in a formal manner. However, increasingly there are more options for flexible delivery and modularisation of the curriculum, with the shift away from time based studies to competency based curricula. Many young people continue to study on a part time basis in less formal arrangements, in less formal settings, some of which are under-resourced in terms of technology and resources in comparison to the mainstream.

How do students find out about their post school vocational options? Almost all schools have a teacher designated to the role of careers counsellor or careers adviser who presents a range of options to students in their final two years. To look around a careers office one cannot be but overwhelmed by the amount of information available for the university sector and increasingly the TAFE sector. However for the students for whom these two options are not viable there is increasing evidence that the alternative range of options is not widely known or effectively communicated. With the reorganisation of secondary schools the training, time allocation and resources available for careers teachers appears to have been cut back in favour of some other program in the school (Sweet *et al* 1997).

The university sector is probably that with which most teachers are familiar, as most teachers themselves attended universities or teachers colleges, which have over the last ten years become a part of the University sector. In this sector, the changes taking place have already impacted on some students in some schools. A number of Universities are offering the 'brightest' students opportunities to undertake first year university subjects in their final year of secondary school, thus enticing these able students into their own courses the following year. On the other hand, some universities are looking to offer fee paying places to students who fail to find a place under the normal selection criteria. Universities are also renegotiating their arrangements with the TAFE sector, providing easier transition between these two sectors. TAFE is gaining popularity at several levels. Now more and more students are choosing a TAFE course after completion of a University degree.

## The expansion of the TAFE sector

Of all sectors of education the one which appears to be flourishing is the TAFE sector. The TAFE sector has expanded dramatically during the eighties and nineties with extensive building programs, a large number of new and diverse courses and most importantly, renewed and invigorated relationships with industry. Thus TAFE has been positioning itself with industry and responding to the demand for vocational training in the workplace. TAFE institutes are now offering an extensive range of courses in partnership with industry. This increases the options for young people who are already in the workforce to upgrade their skills in a formal and recognised manner. The fees in this sector are generally much lower than university HECS fees, but are required to be paid up front, rather than deferred as HECS can be.

Recently the TAFE sector has been reworking its relationships with the school sector. In the past, teachers in the technical school sector were familiar with the TAFE system. Many students, mostly boys, moved on from the technical schools into apprenticeships in the TAFE sector. For generations boys could leave school as soon as they reached the legal age and

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# Editorial

## Shifting boundaries education beyond the school

*Jennifer Angwin, Lindsay Fitzclarence & Russell Matthews*
**Deakin Centre for Education and Change**

Education beyond the school is undergoing far-reaching change as new policies are implemented. These policies have resulted in changed ways of working, changed relationships between providers and changed forms of curricula and assessment. They have clearly ascribed an instrumental purpose to much post-school education by embedding its nature and form in the world of work.

In this heady world of acronyms and policies it is easy to lose sight of the fact that post-school education is a site of competing claims. On the one hand it is constructed in terms of the needs of the economy with catch-phrases such as 'flexible, employable, efficient and multi-skilled' (A Government initiated top-down approach). The economic argument goes something like this. The concept of the value-added workforce (training, re-training, educating) is a national imperative driven by the proposition that clever workers make a clever country. In rapidly changing times workers have to be re-skilled in order to stay clever if Australia is to remain internationally competitive and avoid banana republic status. This view has led to a multitude of workplace initiatives and Federally-funded programs.

Inside, alongside and sometimes in opposition to this dominant discourse there are other stories which act to represent the changing world of continuing education. These largely untold accounts see continuing education as intrinsically worthwhile in its own right and as often driven by a learner's desire for such things as social competencies, pleasure, enhanced sense of self worth, curiosity, career aspirations and a desire to change something. Indeed there are a multitude of community aspirations and initiatives by providers which call for due consideration in terms other than the rhetoric of the dominant, politically powerful story tellers. This edition of Changing Education has taken the opportunity to include both dominant and alternative accounts of continuing education.

move into an apprenticeship, continuing their vocational education within technical institutions. During the recession and economic downturn of the eighties, the number of apprenticeships declined rapidly and remains open for very few students today. The federal government is putting in place a new apprenticeship scheme, the Modern Australian Apprenticeship Training Scheme (MAATS), which it is claimed will address many of the needs for vocational training of young people. However the number of places available remains low and the educational levels to be attained for entry will be high, so that the options for young people who might have lower educational achievement have not been improved.

### Workplace training

Some young people, although a continually decreasing number, will move into full time work. Within the workplace they could well be offered further vocational education and training. Here is where the first major difference between the provision of school education and post school education begins to emerge. Many companies offer in house training within the workplace. During the eighties and nineties the field of workplace education expanded markedly, encouraged by the Training Guarantee Act of 1987. The act put into place the Training Guarantee Levy which required enterprises to put 2% of their budget into training of their employees, or lose this to taxation. Exactly how these funds were to be spent was left up to the enterprises themselves.

For larger enterprises, in-house training has long been a feature of many workplaces. Large organisations such as Telstra or Ford used to train large numbers of apprentices, only a small number of whom would finally move into their own workforce. Due to the large scale of these complex workplaces, the training provided to these young people was of a high standard, often with the latest facilities and equipment. However times have changed and measuring the economic costs of training programs now appears to govern access. Smaller workplaces have never been able to provide such training opportunities and most often have chosen to subsidise the studies of their young workers at TAFE institutes.

Another new development in VET has been the Group Training Scheme. This initiative has sought to support young people and industries by facilitating traineeships. Many young people need a high level of support as they begin their working life and through these group training Schemes the support structures are put in place between the enterprise and the young person. Whilst this group training approach seems to be proving very successful in terms of positive outcomes for young people, there remain far more young people in need of such support schemes than can be placed at this time.

Recently, the Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABS) have gained a more powerful role in the organisation and accreditation of VET courses. Industry has argued persuasively to government that they should control VET courses as they know what is needed in the workplace. There is some concern in the field about the transferability of industry recognised courses from one industry to another, or from one state to another. There is concern that the TAFE Institutes will be marginalised in this provision, and that the moves to national accreditation and the development of a national system of transferable VET courses may be diminished. This is the first major sector in which educational standards and curriculum have been shifted away from the educational sector to industry.

### Opening up a private training market

One of the most complex developments in out-of-school provision of VET has been the rapid expansion of the private training sector. In the past, there had always been private provision of VET, mainly for young women, within the wide spread system of hairdressing and secretarial colleges. It is interesting to note that whereas the state provided for the VET of young men through the apprenticeship system, young women have long had to fund their own VET programs. Since the eighties private provision of VET programs has redefined the sector. In Victoria, the State Training Board has encouraged the development of a private training market, through the registration of private providers to deliver VET programs. A large number of private providers have been registered in the past two years.

One of the first new ventures into this area was the establishment of



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ELICOS Colleges for the provision of English course to overseas students. In the eighties large numbers of these Colleges opened and encouraged overseas students to pay to attend. However close monitoring of these Centres was not put in place which resulted in the collapse of many Colleges, the loss of students fees and considerable damage to Australia's image in Asia as an educational provider. The expansion of private education in this sector had not got off to a reputable start.

There are a number of new comers to the field, who have had no previous experience in the provision of VET courses. Over the past five years over several hundred new private providers of VET course have registered with the State Training Board of OTFE. Many of these groups had not provided VET courses before and have little understanding of the educational requirements of quality vocational education and training. Teachers often find themselves working in a community based venue with no access to a professional library of professional resources to support their programs. Many find themselves working without photocopiers or computers, working in isolation, and are thus unable to develop collegial relationships with other teachers in their field.

One of the largest providers of VET courses to emerge under the new arrangements has been the welfare sector. The Salvation Army, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Sydney City Mission are just some of the new providers of VET. In fact in 1996 the Sydney City Mission was the largest provider of Labour Market Programs in Australia. These welfare agencies have taken up provision of labour market programs for unemployed people, under the federal Labor government's Working Nation policy. Under the current cuts to this policy there is again concern from the welfare agencies as to the training options which will become available to the most disadvantaged groups of unemployed people in the community.

## The emergence of a two tier system of VET provision.

There remains an ongoing debate concerning the provision of VET courses for employed and unemployed people. With the decline in the labour market in Australia generally and particularly the youth labour market, more and more people are directed to VET courses in order to gain entry to work, which perhaps in their region, simply does not exist. Recent figures from the Brotherhood of St Laurence suggested that during one week in 1996, there were over three hundred thousand people registered as looking for work with the CES but less that 90 000 jobs were registered at the same agency. No amount of training can address the reality of a declining labour market, but much of the debate still focuses around the skills area. Recently the federal government required that anyone employed for twenty hours per week is to be considered in full time work, yet managing one's life and family on only twenty hours pay is impossible.

Increasing numbers of teachers working in this sector are finding themselves frustrated in trying to encourage people that the training course they are providing will improve their options for work, while the reality of the disappearance of jobs continues. These Labour Market Programs (LMP) tend to be held in relatively poor surroundings, compared with the youth friendly venues at a TAFE college. Most often there is no cafeteria, no library, computer rooms, not to mention the visiting bands and general student life for young people. Thus it can be argued that a two tiered system is emerging, one for people who are likely to gain employment and their courses will be run within the public institutions and a secondary system for those members of the community who are not likely to find employment and thus will be kept on a training merry go round, gaining more and more certificates, studying at small community venues, never becoming part of the mainstream training provision within the TAFE system, nor for many, ever finding full time work.

## Compulsory competitive tendering

As well as fostering a two tier system, the general shift to privatisation has had profound effects on the employment and training of teachers. However, there has been ongoing debate as to whether a true private market for these sorts of educational programs ever existed or can be created (Anderson). The privatisation of these educational programs raises serious questions concerning supply based solely on economic imperatives rather than educational ones.

One of the least productive effects of the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering has been the breakdown of strong collaborative working relationships between providers. When funding becomes dependent on the number of students each provider can attract to their own programs, each provider becomes a competitor with the other providers, seeking to find and retain as many students as possible. The best outcomes for students can only be achieved by strong cooperation between providers, where a student is referred on from one provider to another to find the most suitable course for that young person. But this tradition of collaboration has been broken down, as each provider now is required to tender for new funding rather than be guaranteed ongoing funding for specific programs. As funding is dependent in part on student numbers, providers no longer feel they are able to cooperate with each other for the benefit of the students.

## Patterns of employment of teachers and trainers

Since the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering and the instability this has caused providers in long term planning, the employment of teachers in the field has suffered a major setback. Most teachers in adult education have not been permanently employed, but many were employed under an on-going contract system. A considerable number of teachers had always been employed and paid on a sessional basis, making it extremely difficult to maintain a viable pattern of work and reliable income. The introduction of tendering to replace ongoing funding has resulted in a great deal of instability in the field, with providers not knowing whether they would be funded to continue providing their programs, or whether their funding allocation would increase. This produces staffing instability. In such an unstable situation it has been easy for program managers to cut back on ongoing employment in favour of more casualised patterns of employment.

## Educational background of teachers and trainers

One major difference encountered in the adult education sector lies within the training of teachers and trainers. In the school sector, teachers are expected to have completed four years of tertiary education and indeed many teachers have completed more than this. In the TAFE sector, employment has always been related to 'industrial experience', rather than formal qualifications in education. Teachers have most often come through the trade system themselves and finally undertaken a one year diploma in education, similar to many secondary teachers. However with the new accredited short courses, increasing numbers of trainers who have industrial experience but little or no formal qualifications in education are moving into the field . Two or three day train-the-trainer workshops are the extent of many trainers formal studies in education. Given that most trainers are now delivering externally designed curricula, there is growing concern that they have limited experience in education.

## Concluding note

The eighties and nineties, will, upon reflection be seen as a time of intense change. The forces of new technology are driving us into new (and for many untenable) positions in our society. On the one hand we are told it has resulted in many new jobs being created whilst all around us we are confronted by the reality of mass unemployment.. We are also told that the effects of globalisation of the economy will bring new opportunities for development and expansion, whilst local factories are closed in order to enable the companies to competitively enter the new global markets.

As teachers, our discourses have changed into the new language of the economy. We too are being forced to see education as a marketable commodity and schools as new market places, which must find the cutting edge in order to maintain their place in the market. Students are seen as the client group which must be wooed with slick advertising, glossy

products, and the latest fad offerings in the curriculum. At the same time there are increasing numbers of students leaving our schools with barely enough basic skills to help them find any employment, if indeed there are jobs to be found.

In the current context of the intensification of work, the cuts in funding and the admonition to work smarter, and to do more with less, it is easy to neglect significant educational questions. What is the role of education in a truly civil society? What role does education play in forming the new citizens of tomorrow? What does it mean to replace education with training? What is the nature and purpose of education and training in a contracting job market where competence does not necessarily mean employment?

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## ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ALBE | Adult Literacy and Basic Education |
| ALLP | Australian Language and Literacy Policy |
| ACFE | Adult, Community and Further Education |
| AMEP | Adult Migrant Education Program |
| CSWE | Certificate of Spoken and Written English |
| CGEA | Certificate of General Education for Adults |
| DEETYA | Department of Education , Employment, Training and Youth Affairs |
| ELICOS | English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas students |
| EPE | Employment Placement Enterprises |
| ITAB | Industry training Advisory Board |
| LMP | Labour Market Programs |
| MAATS | Modern Australian Apprenticeship Scheme |
| NTF | National Training Framework |
| NTRA | National Training Reform Agenda |
| OTFE | Office of Training and Further Education |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| WELL | Workplace English Language and Literacy |
| DIMA | Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs |
| CALP | Commonwealth Adult Literacy Program |
| SIP | Special Intervention Program |
| OLMA | Office of Labour Market Adjustment |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| ACAL | Australian Council of Adult Literacy |
| VALBEC | Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council |
| NCAELLS | National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy |
| PEPEs | Public Employment Placement Enterprises |

# Case Studies in Teaching Critical Literacy to Adult NESB Students

ADRIAN FITZGERALD, ROBIN KENDRICK, BESSIE O'CONNOR AND ROD MACLEAN

This article presents three case studies written by practitioners in ALBE or Adult ESL in 1995 as part of a Master's unit on Critical Literacy. Their work has been edited for inclusion here because the case studies exemplify approaches to critical literacy for adult learners which are practical and also grounded in theory. The writers have an awareness of the limits of critical literacy and use these case studies to test both its weaknesses and its strengths. They show that a critical literacy is not created only through the use of media or workplace texts but also relies on a teacher's ability to capitalise on students' own literacies. They highlight students' critical awareness of the way they are positioned by their knowledge of English and by their place in an institutional context of training or work, and show how this awareness can be exploited to develop teaching activities.

## Case Study 1

ADRIAN FITZGERALD

The students in this case study are adult migrants and mostly long term residents of Australia. The majority became unemployed late in their working lives, but were nevertheless required to attend Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET, as it was in 1995) funded literacy/work-orientation courses as a condition of their unemployment benefits.

The day before the verdict was due to be announced in the O.J. Simpson trial, I wrote the words O.J. Simpson on the board and asked the students who he was. With some prompting, nearly all demonstrated that they were familiar with the case, although one student thought O.J. Simpson was the star of a TV show. A quick poll suggested that all students thought he should be found guilty. I arranged with students for a number of copies of three daily newspapers (*The Herald-Sun, The Age, The Australian*) to be brought to class the next day.

The front page treatment of the announcement of the verdict was a good way of raising with students the discourse of newspaper reporting. *The Herald-Sun* and *The Age*, for instance, used the same photo but constructed a different view of the matter through their choice of headlines and leading stories. *The Australian* employed the abstract terms 'justice', 'race' and 'money'. *The Herald-Sun* avoided this approach. Its headline was personal and glamorous: 'Mr Millions'. The Age headline was critical, but employed the concrete words 'black and white' rather than the abstract term 'race'. Money was not mentioned. The Age's three photo split, with O.J. Simpson in the middle flanked by a joyous row of blacks on the left and a distraught huddle of whites on the right, reinforced in a visual way the sense of the headline 'O.J. divides black and white America'.

There ensued some discussion about what type of reader the newspapers might be trying to attract, and how the readers were being positioned through the use of different language and images. The students, however, raised the stakes by observing that the three papers were more similar than different. All three newspapers, they explained, were reporting the O.J. Simpson case as a sensational story. The reason, above all else, for the story being on the front page was more than a genuine interest in the issues; it was the drive to sell newspapers and make money. The photos, they pointed out, were all from the same source and the advertisements in the front right corner of both *The Age* and *The Australian* were for the same product. In other words, everyone was being served a similar porridge.

The students identified one of the dominant discourses ruling the major daily newspapers on this issue so readily because of their access to newspapers in other languages. They said the O.J. Simpson case was not such a big deal in their local ethnic papers and that there were often important things happening in their home countries which were not mentioned in the English language press in Melbourne.

It became clear to me that the students read newspapers more than I had been aware, and that they felt 'locked out' by the English papers that ignored issues of interest and concern to them. My response has been to introduce a session twice a week where students are encouraged to bring newspaper articles to class that they consider interesting - the articles may be in their own language (i.e. first language) or in English. The students then work with their partners to develop the English required to relate the substance of the story in English to the rest of the class. New words that the students learn can become part of their vocabulary list.

The change that took place when the students started bringing their chosen articles to class attests to the truth of Freire's (1972) statement that Western education generates an opposition between teacher and learner, coloniser and colonised. Roberto from Argentina, for example, brought an article about the leaders of a failed coup in Argentina fleeing to Uruguay to seek asylum. The article did not explain the whole story, but Roberto was able to fill in the background and suddenly became 'the expert', patiently introducing the rest of the non-Argentinians in the class to the politics of his region.

A further case in point was Maria. The article she brought to class was in English from the *Herald-Sun*. This is an article I could have theoretically brought to class myself, but I know I never would have. It was about breast-cancer and the need for women to have regular checkups. I would have felt this issue was too delicate to raise but the response Maria obtained not just from the other women, but from the men, showed that it was a topic long overdue.

In 'The Literacy Letters' Brodkey (1989) amplifies this experience when she writes that where the teacher pretends the classroom is a sphere free from the issues of class, race and gender, she is ignoring the reality of the students' lives and so losing the opportunity to allow them to explore the issues that in part define them.

One of the consequences of endeavouring not to colonise the content of lessons was the stronger emergence of social and cultural differences and sensibilities within the group.

Literacy practices, as Street (1994) argues in a paper on cross-cultural perspectives, are constitutive of identity and personhood. Different facets of a person are called upon for different purposes and contexts. In the multicultural classroom, the dominant ideology can disregard and suppress a multiplicity of literacies which take place outside the classroom and in so doing deny the students the means of expressing their identity.

In the first half of the student program I set up a reading-and-writing-for-knowledge segment where once a week we read a passage about China and then tried to write a passage in a similar style and genre about Australia. [The students are enrolled in a number of modules in the Certificate of General English for Adults (CGEA) which is constructed around a genre approach to literacy].

In the second half of the program I let students choose the reading passages. The result has not only been an increase in the range of texts but also a divergence in the use of media. Dennis, for example, who is a poor attender and rarely engrossed in classwork, brought a racing form guide and an advertisement for the Crown Casino. Chhun brought an audio-cassette tape of Kampuchean traditional music together with drawings of the instruments and written descriptions of each in English. Mahmoud brought a video tape in English about Lebanon. Maria brought an extract from a book about Argentina entitled 'The Sugar, Salt and Spice of Relationships' in which a certain popular style of flirting in Argentina called a 'piropo' is explained.

I had grossly underestimated the ways in which the students were being literate outside the classroom, and their need to express their cultural heritage. Their enthusiasm for the revised lesson format in contrast to the previous routine adds a certain validity to the reflection that 'non-

acquisition may be an act of resistance and a valid response to alienation' (S. van Harskamp-Smith & K. van Harskamp-Smith 1994, p. 7).

My experience also calls attention to the limits of the genre approach, or rather it highlights the fact that a genre approach cannot be applied uncritically. For although genre pedagogy effectively focuses on the employment of discourse structures to convey certain types of information, it does not reflect on how the content or the form of the text, or the source of the text, might include or exclude the students. Kamler (1997) cites the example of a 'misogynist' text produced (but not commented on) in a classroom where genre-based pedagogy was being used to teach instructional writing. In my classroom, I was focusing on the 'knowledge' genre and connecting poorly with types of knowledge that the students considered important to the expression of their identities and world-views.

Another example of the lack of connection with students' world views is class work with a textbook called *Work Awareness*, which the students undertook once a week. Published by the AMES the text is intended to inform the students about the culture of work and help them plot a career path.

In unit one of the book, the students are asked to complete a timeline of their work history and then write 'the story of their working life'. To assist they are given a model. Working with the students on this exercise in the first half of the current program, it became clear that they were reluctant to attempt the task at all, and the histories that they produced reflected this.

When I later analysed this poor result (I had wanted to use the information to compile a file on each student for departmental use) I assumed that the students were reluctant because the exercise was prying too closely into their personal lives. This is a stance with which I am very sympathetic. The bureaucracy (DEET and the College) demands all sorts of information from students in the name of employment assistance, but rarely delivers the promised jobs.

I came to understand that there were other factors at work here. Ivanic (1994) observes that writing does not just convey information, it conveys something about the writer. The writer is positioned both by the content and the form of what is written. When writers feel 'stuck' it can be (albeit subconsciously) that they feel uncomfortable with the image of self that they are projecting. Raising a writer's critical awareness of the way language works can, Ivanic argues, lead to positive action.

Bearing this in mind, I turned back to the model case history of 'Bill', presented to students as part of their unit. The story is not innocuous. It tells the history of a young man who 'knows' where he is going. Bill, as presented in the model, is successful at every turn and a bright future beckons. The exclusion of 'personal' events from the account of Bill's working life also creates the questionable dichotomy between working life and private life. Finally, Bill's working life, as recorded, is a relatively short five years, and the sequenced chronology excludes other ways of ordering events.

Such a story, I could see, was not a very appropriate model for my class, a third of whom are female, most of whom have long working lives behind them (over which they had limited control), and none of whom had or would be able to pursue one of the traditional career paths open to young native Australian men.

I discussed these issues with the students and felt that a number of points struck a chord with them. I suggested that they try again to write about their working lives, but this time with the purpose of jotting down only some of the dates and details or thoughts that they could use to talk about their careers with someone else in the class. Personal events I suggested could also be included.

Knowing their audience was not going to be critical, and not feeling constrained by an inappropriate model, the students seemed to feel more relaxed about the image they would be projecting. Once they started talking about themselves, they also remembered more about their work and their lives in general, some of which they wrote down.

The students moved from being reluctant to being enthusiastic. It sounds rather sentimental, but at the end of the lesson Roberto came up to me and said, 'Thank you for helping me to remember. There is so much I had forgotten'

Writing in a particular way means appearing to be a certain type of person (Ivanic 1994). Deconstructing Bill's story with the students (discussing the implied ideals and the genre of the time-line etc.) helped the students recognise how they were being positioned by the text and gave them the confidence to deviate from the model. In this respect I consider the notion of Critical Language Awareness a useful concept to work with (and to discuss with the students) even though the students may not be able to apply the principles to their situation without assistance.

### Case Study Two

**Robin Kendrick**

I recently took over an established workplace literacy class at the Port Melbourne Authority. This site provides an insight into the contending discourses still operating in the adult language and literacy field, as the previous teacher had a functional approach to literacy. She taught literacy as a set of predetermined language competencies to be taught with a focus on decoding a single text, and fill-the-gap vocabulary development activities around Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) memos. She did not move beyond a focus on the language within text and was not aware of the critical literacy understandings her students already had of the wider social practices the texts represented in this workplace. In doing so, she ignored the fact that workers are acutely aware of the rhetoric of management and the gaps and silences, power relations, and ideologies operating within and around workplace texts. They are constant receivers of bureaucratic texts but never have the opportunity to write their own texts.

All the workers in the class had been working at the wharves as cleaners for at least 20 years and were long term residents from LOTE backgrounds with minimal formal education in their own country, and no writing skills in English. They were funded by management with the ostensible aim of improving workplace communication with a particular focus on reading OHS memos and working teams.

In my first class with them I approached the use of memos from a critical literacy perspective. The discussion which follows centres on memos called 'Skin Cancer Awareness' and 'Use of Appropriate Containers' and illustrates key issues about reading and textual authority, particularly that meaning depends on who is reading the text, for what purpose and in what context. We began by discussing what students already knew about skin cancer and the action they might take to prevent it. All remembered the 'slip, slop, slap' campaign and the fact that the greatest risk of burning was in the middle of the day.

I then focused on the production and consumption of the text loosely based around the following questions:

- Who has produced the text and why?
- What is the purpose to the text?
- What do you do with these OHS notices?

They sometimes received 15 memos a week which they rarely read: 'We just have to sign that we've received them but we never read them'. One shift group never received memos as the supervisor considered them a waste of time. There was an overall cynicism particularly about the OHS officer: 'He's paid a lot of money to sit at his desk and be seen to be doing something.' The reasons for this cynicism became more apparent after we read and discussed the OHS notice on skin cancer. I did not teach the students any linguistic analysis as they were grappling with developing their decoding skills. Threadgold (1994) argues that it is teachers who need this technical knowledge and should selectively apply it when teaching reading and writing. After reading we discussed the authoritative tone of the text and rewrote the key information in more accessible language. Students did not need to be prompted to analyse what was missing in the text: 'We are all from Mediterranean background - skin cancer not a problem for us. It's white Australians who burn.'

The key information in the text was that the PMA was providing their outdoor workers with sunhats, sunscreen, lip protection and sunglasses, obtainable from their supervisors. One worker had actually requested these items from his supervisor only to be told there were budgetary problems and these items couldn't be purchased until next year!!! This was not an isolated incident. An OHS notice we read the following week included: *Use of drink bottles to hold cleaning fluid is to cease forthwith. Small containers can be obtained by contacting stores.* According to the students the



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supply of small containers initially purchased had run out. Unmarked drink bottles containing chemicals were all around the port and there were no funds to replenish supplies.

Critical literacy promises the world but can it deliver? Most writers around critical literacy claim that it can be truly emancipatory and liberating through strategic or textual action with/or against the text. (Luke *et al* 1994, Gilbert 1993, Lankshear 1994). Shannon (1991) goes so far as to contend that critical literacy fosters 'an activism towards equal participation for all decisions that affect and control our lives.' I naively asked the workers what action they could take to alert management to the discrepancies between the rhetoric and reality of the notices. No one was prepared to approach or write to management. The reality of this workplace site is that these cleaners are at the bottom of the pile. They are at risk of having their jobs tendered out to outside contractors and do not want to do anything that risks their position. These workers come to this class knowing what critical reading is yet are abused by fellow Australian born workers in their breaks: 'you don't know English you have to go back to prep.' Knowing what ideologies are at work does not mean we can change them. The readings made of these OHS texts show that reading does not occur in a 'social vacuum' (Gilbert 1993).

Readers produce different readings because they draw differently on the social context. One can surmise that the reading the OHS officer makes of the skin cancer awareness text is that he has implemented Policy HR:03:08 in section 6 of the OH&S Handbook. The reading a government inspector may well make is that occupational health and safety procedures are in place. In my classroom context the students already knew that a text sits within the wider social context and the readings made are dependent upon who you are. I saw my role as needing to clarify for them that they already had a critical literacy and that literacy is not just about being able to write correct English.

The literacy classes at Port Melbourne Authority have been implemented to facilitate workers readings of Occupational Health and Safety texts, but it is management's convoluted language that needs to be addressed. When 'Plain English' training for management was suggested and demonstrated at a tripartite committee meeting as a means for improving written communication between workers and management, the blame was placed at the feet of the workers and their perceived language deficit. Management held on to the language of power and the use of convoluted phrasing because it, like the workers, recognised the importance of literacy as an instrument of power.

### Case Study 3
### Bessie O'Connor

Students in this Case Study attended an Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES) centre and were long term migrants, mainly from a Greek background. The majority had worked as machinists in the clothing industry. After retrenchment, they were given two-year contracts to study English with a vocational focus. Students were offered the CGEA, education and vocational counselling, and two weeks work observation in a new employment field of their choice.

An impetus to one teaching activity was class dissatisfaction with job search tasks set by the educational counsellor. The aim of the task was to familiarise students with the job search process and independent learning strategies. Students agreed to attempt the set tasks which required a visit to individual Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) offices, phoning companies to find out about future employment opportunities in the students' preferred field and to read relevant texts in the Victorian Job Guide. After completion of these tasks, students verbally complained to me that the tasks were a waste of time and that they were at school to learn 'correct' English, not to waste their time speaking to people who couldn't understand them on the phone or to do tasks that were too difficult for them.

To enable students to think critically about the nature of their complaints, I set a written task, namely a formal letter of complaint to the education counsellor about the job search tasks. Freire (1972) points out that the literacy process, as cultural freedom for action, is an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator. The letters of complaint showed that students used the appropriate language, but failed to critically evaluate the process they had been through. Freire (1972) states that to be an act of knowing, the adult literacy process demands a relationship of authentic dialogue between teachers and students. To build the authentic dialogue and to aid critical thinking, I asked students to analyse the content of their letters by listing the disadvantages of the set tasks and to think of any advantages or benefits they might have acquired.

In the group discussion and evaluation, students commented that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages However, they were still not satisfied with the outcome of the job search process and debated how they could formulate a letter that would express their concerns, yet at the same time use appropriate language that would not offend the education counsellor. Freire (1972) states that, if it is an event that encourages the critical reflection of both learners and educators, the literacy process must relate speaking the word to transforming reality, and to a person's role in this reality It was suggested that the students re-examine whether their letters were in fact letters of complaint or if a new group letter had to be drafted to the education counsellor explaining their feelings about the issue. I hoped that they would find a group voice and recognise that through appropriate, socially responsible language they would be empowered in using the group voice 'we' to effect change.

Through negotiation and brain storming, the class wrote up ideas for a letter on the whiteboard. Joint construction of the text, conferencing, redrafting, and editing led to the final copy of the letter being written by a nominated scribe. The writing of the text became a purposeful social practice where students had to position themselves politically and concentrate on whether the job skills task had been beneficial or disadvantageous to their learning program and what outcome they wanted to achieve through their actions.

Publication of the letter occurred after it was signed and sent to the education counsellor before the next education counselling session. A vocational session with the counsellor followed and during this session students expressed further concern about the content of the course and the nature of the tasks. The education counsellor after consulting me about the issues, decided that the appropriate line of action would be a formal written reply. In her reply, she positioned herself as writer, educator and receiver of information but also as a counsellor concerned with student fears. The literacy event required codification and decodification (Freire 1972) and enabled both educators and learners to arrive at what Freire maintains is the critical level of knowing. Through the formal letter writing task students analysed aspects of their own existential experience and in the decodifying process changed their opinion and replaced it with critical knowledge (Freire 1972).

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# Back to the Margins?
# The New Scenario for Adult Literacy and ESL

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The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP, Dawkins 1991) has come to an end. Its stated purpose, to tie training in English language and literacy skills to micro economic reform and a vision of the 'clever country', was central to Labor's National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA). Under the Coalition, the NTRA is no longer named as such, although many of its reforms in industrial training have been retained and some, which are consistent with continuing deregulation and privatisation, are being intensified. Labour Market Programs (LMPs) which poured two and a quarter billion dollars into training and labour market assistance in 1995-1996 (Commonwealth of Australia 1996, pp. 3-203) have been abandoned. The ending of Special Intervention Programs (SIP) and the Office of Labour Market Adjustment (OLMA) programs, which provided full-time English as a Second Language (ESL), literacy and/or vocational retraining to thousands of job-seekers has impacted severely on teachers and providers. Opportunities which were provided through the ALLP for unemployed people to gain basic skills and to access pathways into education and training have been removed.

Teachers and providers of ALBE (Adult Literacy and Basic Education) and ESL (English as a Second Language) are now facing a new wave of policy reversals and institutional restructuring. Can 'the field' survive another round of change: one which is even more radical than that of 1992—1996? A bleak and uncertain future lies ahead due to the devastation of course provision and teachers' jobs which has already occurred and the new system of private employment services and national training packages being set in place.

Over the last decade ALBE has emerged from the institutional margins in neighbourhood and community houses, the Council of Adult Education (CAE), TAFE compensatory education departments and volunteer networks. Since 1987 it has been brought into the mainstream through state and national policy development and recurrent funding. The ALLP was the culmination of this process of rapid policy development in language and literacy—a product of the 1980s when growing public awareness, community activism and media attention focused increasingly on issues of adult literacy. The International Literacy Year (ILY) in 1990 publicised the notions of literacy as a 'right' and illiteracy as a social and economic cost. The ALLP built on both of these themes. By combining the welfarist and social justice discourses of the 80s with human capital theory and the imperative to build a competitive economy in a globalised market, it made language and literacy training a key strategy in national economic policy. At the same time it was part of a 'discursive sea change' in which notions of equity, in particular gender equity, were 'technologised', 'ritualised' and subsumed into notions of accessibility and efficiency (Butler 1996, p. 2). (See also Blackmore 1996, Kenway 1994). In both ALBE and ESL, the ALLP challenged the meanings, pedagogies and socially critical practices which had evolved 'on the margins' and had until then constituted the traditions of the field (See Bradshaw 1994, Sanguinetti 1994, Seddon 1994, Lee & Wickert 1995, Moore 1995, Brennan 1996).

ESL provision, which has been funded through the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) since the 1960s, has undergone a similar process of rapid development from the margins towards the mainstream over the last fifteen years. In 1986 the first permanent positions were created in the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) and support was given for teachers to gain specialist qualifications. This provided the basis for forward planning, a cohesive structure and the development of a fund of expertise. A proliferation of programs and funding structures has occurred since then. There has been recurrent funding through TAFE and the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) division of the Office of Technical and Further Education (OTFE)[1] for community-based providers. Private providers, including providers of English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS), have mushroomed. This period of rapid growth and development has taken its toll; the AMES has experienced continuing re structuring and reorganisation, producing a state of chronic anxiety and uncertainty amongst teachers (Angwin 1996, chapter 4).

To understand the impact of the most recent wave of changes, these need to be considered in the context of far-reaching changes over the last five years; in particular, the ALLP/NTRA policies which had already radically restructured the field.

From the point of view of both ESL and ALBE teachers, the ALLP/NTRA period was deeply paradoxical. On the one hand, it enabled ALBE to emerge as an identifiable 'field', with a huge expansion of course provision, a proliferation of new projects, curriculum frameworks, and consultative mechanisms such as the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy (NCAELLS). On the other hand, the ESL and ALBE fields were destabilised by a whirlwind of other changes. The new era of accreditation, accountability and vocationalism constrained and fragmented progressivist and critical ways of teaching. Competency-based assessment diminished the professional autonomy of teachers, emphasising pre-defined, performative outcomes rather than holistic and learner-centred pedagogies. The transfer of responsibility to the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) for assessment, referral and allocation of students to classes further reduced the professional role of teachers. The introduction of the competitive training market severely undermined provider networks and traditions of collaboration between the many small providers in the field. Teachers were forced into short-term contracts and lowly-paid casual work with minimal job security and very limited career prospects.

Despite all of this, ESL and ALBE teachers rose to the challenge and collaborated with the CES to provide successful programs through AMES centres, community providers, private providers, SkillShares, the CAEs and TAFE colleges. Looking back, the period of the ALLP/NTRA was both traumatic and productive. On the one hand, it was a period of great stress, contradiction and turmoil as the field attempted to come to terms with radical 'top down' policy and an official redefinition of what literacy is all about. On the other hand, it was a period characterised by much developmental activity: large-scale national projects in adult literacy to develop an adult literacy and ESL evaluation plan, a national, integrated research strategy, a professional development implementation plan and a national mapping of unmet needs, to name a few. At the grassroots level, there were well-attended conferences and forums organised by the professional bodies; debates about the politics and practicalities of the NTRA and Labour Market Programs; creative teaching and creative curriculum development as teachers acquired new sets of skills; critical reflection within the field about how 'good practice' could be defended and continue to evolve in the new context. Most importantly and despite its many failings, the ALLP/NTRA did provide



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large numbers of unemployed people with access to significant opportunities for language and literacy learning within broad-based, vocational and general programs.

Teachers, still reeling from the impact of these radical changes (and their contradictory effects), now face another deluge of new, centrally-imposed and even more destabilising policy. How much more change can the field cope with? Nicole Gilding, in her keynote address at the 1995 conference of the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) and the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC), argued that the field is already 'changed out' and the rate of developmental activity is not sustainable. (Gilding 1995, p. 83). Jo Lo Bianco made a similar observation at the 1996 VALBEC conference (Lo Bianco 1996) when he detailed the major discursive shifts that have taken place in adult literacy policy over the last twenty years and asked how 'tractable' we will continue to be.

In the last four years, the majority of both ESL and ALBE courses have been funded as Labour Market Programs and their loss has already had a severe impact. It must also be remembered that a significant amount of recurrent funding for ALBE and ESL had been redirected into LMPs when these were first introduced in 1993. Two thirds of the Commonwealth Adult Literacy Program (CALP) and a proportion of Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) and Advanced English for Migrants Program (AEMP) funds had been rolled into LMPs so that there was a net loss of recurrent funding for these programs at that point. Now, with the ending of LMPs and a major restructure of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) funding for on-arrival programs taking place simultaneously, there will be a greatly reduced recurrent funding base for language and literacy.

A brief and informal survey of some teaching centres through our own personal networks (JS and CR) has revealed that for most, provision of ESL and ALBE has been approximately halved in the last twelve months. In one major TAFE college in Victoria, ESL classes have been reduced from 28 classes spread over 4 different campuses in first semester 1996, to 18 classes spread over 2 campuses in first semester 1997. At another major TAFE college, recurrent funding has taken up some of the SIP-funded ESL and literacy courses, but there have been significant losses of both teachers' jobs and courses and loss of morale. Private providers have been particularly badly hit; two that we know of have lost about 75% of their tenders over the last 12 months. Not only has provision been cut drastically but student numbers in remaining courses are also seriously down. According to our informants this is because the CES offices are in disarray and CES personnel have given up referring clients for assessment and training. This appears to be the result of the uncertainty and demoralisation in local offices caused by the impending new arrangements.

The remaining Labour Market Programs (LMPs) are trickling to a halt and all are due to finish in November 1997. After that, the new scenario will be put in place. The main changes will be as follows:

* The National Training Framework (NTF), the new system of entry-level training, will replace the previously announced Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship Scheme (MAATS). The Industry Training Boards (ITABS) will be responsible for the development of National Training Packages (NTPs) against which all training will be assessed and skills recognised through Skills Passports to establish qualifications.
* NTPs will consist of three 'endorsed components' and a set of 'tools and resources'. The endorsed components are: industry competency standards, agreed assessment guidelines and a revised Australian qualifications framework. The tools and resources are: learning strategies, professional development, assessment resources and unit costs. The ITABS are reviewing industry competency standards and developing new ones. ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) staff are drawing up the assessment guidelines and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The ITABS are currently tendering out the development of 'tools and resources' components of the NTPs.
* Literacy and numeracy will be integrated into NTPs but in what form is not yet known. Lobbying is currently taking place for explicit literacy and numeracy standards to be spelt out and applied in detail within the 'tools and resources' components so that industry trainers can be skilled in literacy and numeracy assessment and support. It is clear, however, that language, literacy and numeracy are to be integrated into industry training as far as possible and are likely to lose their identity as a discrete area of training.
* The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs is piloting a new tendering process for the AMEP which will drastically affect how ESL is organised and funded. Victoria has been divided into five regions, and providers must tender for whole regions, for a period of 3 or possibly 5 years. The large TAFE colleges and the AMES are now competing against each other to win a few very big tenders. The outcome will not be known until July, but in the meantime, no one knows which providers will go to the wall, and which will prosper. There is an atmosphere of tension and anxiety pervading the field and there is no possibility of forward planning.
* With the abolition of LMPs, the employment services of the CES are to be corporatised and privatised. A new statutory authority, the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency (CSDA), will be set up by the Department of Social Security (DSS) to provide a 'one shop stop delivery service'. The CSDA will take over most services currently provided by the DSS and the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) including registration of job seekers for income support, self help facilities, a data base of vacancies and referral to employment assistance agencies. The CSDA will also screen jobseekers to establish eligibility for unemployment benefits and for training support. Training will only be made available to those categorised as being eligible for Intensive Employment Assistance (IEA). These will mainly be the long-term unemployed, 15—20 year olds and other 'disadvantaged' groups. A new 'capacity to benefit' criterion will further reduce the numbers of those eligible to receive training.
* A competitive market will be established for employment placement services. Employment Placement Enterprises (EPEs) will compete for contracts to provide employment services and find jobs for clients. Corporatised Public Employment Placement Enterprises (PEPEs), into which current CES staff are to be transferred, will compete with the EPEs in the employment placement market. EPEs and PEPEs will also have to compete for eligible clients, each of whom will attract a 'customised assistance package' of training, job search allowance, wage subsidies and a possible 'incentive payment' for being placed in employment. The EPE case managers will decide whether and what training may be included in the assistance and funded out of the customised assistance package and period of training will be twelve months. EPEs and PEPEs will receive payments from DEETYA according to the kind of 'outcome' they achieve for their clients. Placements for those placed in full-time jobs, apprenticeships or traineeships will attract a higher reward than placement in part-time work or in accredited education or training courses (Vanstone 1996).
* Since 1989 the Department of Further Education, now the Adult, Community and Further Education Board, (ACFEB) has provided state recurrent funds for coordination and development of adult literacy programs through regional, community-based councils of ACFE throughout the State. Last year, with a move to 'unit costing' all funding was tied to programs, rather than student contact hours and successful provision. The result has been a 50% cut in infrastructure with which to provide the same number of student contact hours (Simmons 1996, p. 12). Next year, all ACFE programs are to go out to competitive tender.

The changes listed above give some indication of the turmoil and uncertainty now being experienced in the fields of

ALBE and ESL. Teachers in TAFE colleges, private and community providers and in AMES centres, the vast majority of whom are working on short term or sessional contracts, have no idea whether they will have jobs after November this year when the last of the labour market programs finish and current AMEP funding arrangements are due to expire. Providers are unable to advise students as to future pathways or do any planning apart from gearing up to launch themselves into the new 'job placement market'.

One certainty is that overall, there will be a huge reduction in course provision throughout the AMES, TAFE colleges, community and private providers. LMPs have now been reduced to whatever training the case managers deem to be appropriate within the constraints of 12 month assistance packages. Moreover, it will not be in their interest to spend more than a minimum amount of the package each job-seeker will attract, before trying to place. As the overall period of assistance is limited, and case managers will be working to place clients as quickly as possible, it is likely that they will contract providers to put on short, highly targeted courses in which language and literacy will be closely integrated with vocational content. How, and according to what processes, clients from different EPEs will be grouped so as to form viable classes, and how much provision will be required, nobody knows.

In order to survive, and to obtain students for classes, many small providers of ESL and ALBE are now preparing themselves to become EPEs, i.e., to join in the 'job placement market' and to take over much of the case management, labour brokerage and referral which CES offices are currently doing. (Business and industry associations, private personnel companies as well as voluntary and community organisations will also be encouraged to tender.) Teachers will transform themselves into case managers and will have to develop new skills to place clients in jobs (which may be undesirable or nonexistent), organise them into 'work for the dole' positions and report to DEETYA on their level of compliance.

The case managers will be aiming to secure the maximum bounty for each client. Under the current proposal, this will range from between $2,500 for a 'category 1 client' who is placed in part-time work or full-time accredited training, to $10,000 for 'category 3' clients (long-term unemployed who are of Aboriginal descent or are disabled) placed in full-time work for a minimum of six months. There will be a strong financial disincentive to provide training: unspent 'upfront' payments can be retained by the EPEs and no reporting to DEETYA will be required on levels of expenditure per client. Clearly, EPEs which are also training providers or industrial employers may experience significant conflicts of interest in deciding where best to place clients. Presumably, the designers of this 'managed market' are hoping that the mechanisms of the competitive market (clients may shop around for the EPE or PEPE of their choice) will solve any such potential problems.

It is questionable whether the amount of training that can be funded out of the notional 'assistance packages' (which are the same as the 'upfront payments') will be enough to produce any significant learning outcomes in language and literacy. The 'accredited courses' into which clients may be placed would have to be recurrently funded TAFE courses or (in Victoria) courses funded through ACFEB. What the demand will be for these courses is also a big unknown. ACFE-funded ALBE and ESL classes in neighbourhood houses and community centres will no doubt help to take up the slack. However, as ACFE-funded courses are almost all part-time, participation in them by clients would not be seen as a 'payable placement outcome'. As a manager of a community learning centre recently noted, 'the move towards private case workers under the guise of EPE and PEPE where the brief is outcomes before payment will see the literacy client low on the list of "attractive" fundraising clients, particularly if this person is also over 45' (Simmons 1996, p. 349).

The role of literacy and ESL in industry and workplace training is obscure and it is not yet clear how they will be written into the new National Training Packages. Increasingly, the emphasis will be on prepackaged, standardised, flexible learning modules and greater integration of language and literacy with on-the-job industrial training. The provision of separate language and literacy classes, in work time, will soon be a thing of the past (Parkinson 1995, p. 12).

Rosa McKenna, Director of the Victorian office of 'Languages Australia' writes in the recent issue of Fine Print that 'we can no longer rely on a separate notion of literacy and numeracy provision and be assured of infrastructure for that provision. The emphasis will be on the broader outcomes of employment and productivity and co-ordinators of adult literacy programs will be found as case managers, industry trainers and assessors and consultants to ITABs, enterprises and trainers' (McKenna 1997, p. 21).

ESL, for which there is a clear, on-going need, will continue to be provided after more reorganisation, restructuring and reduction. However, there will be a further loss of expertise as infrastructure disappears and teachers are forced to go overseas to find work or to move into other areas of training. Given our international reputation in this area and the current push to market curriculum and teaching materials overseas, the sacrifice of centres of professional excellence and individual expertise will be counter-productive in the long term.

Whether or not ALBE survives and adult literacy teaching continues as a distinct profession and field of expertise seems to be an open question. Some people are predicting a return to the marginal status of the early to mid 80s This may not be a bad thing altogether. At the recent ACFE research conference Marie Brennan spoke about the strategic possibilities of marginality as follows:

> Despite being the poor relation (in more ways than one) in education the ACFE field has also reaped many benefits from its hitherto marginal status. It has proved a significant place to reinvent educational practices, new relations between staff and students, offering new groups of students different educational opportunities and definitions of success...
>
> Those who have not been so socialised into 'mainstream' ways of doing things may also be in a position to invent different modes of organisation, different ways of producing power relations, different value systems for research. I am thus suggesting that the field can use its hitherto marginal status to develop a strategic sense of the benefits of marginality—and the not inconsiderable skills and knowledges developed through that positioning—in order to contribute to the invention of a new approach to mainstreaming, perhaps one which is much more accepting of diversity, and one which interrogates its own power relations as they are put in place (Brennan 1996, p. 9).

One literacy teacher and co-ordinator in a neighbourhood learning centre seemed to echo the idea of strategic marginality. She said that she felt the field had too much depth of experience and had contributed too much not to survive. Her approach would be to step to one side, diversify activities and sources of funding and hold onto quality and pedagogical integrity. 'When this current phase of ideologically-driven madness is over', she said, 'we will still be there...'

## Note

1 These are Victorian Government agencies. Similar patterns have occurred in other States.

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## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| ACFE | Adult, Community and Further Education (Victoria) |
| ACFEB | Adult, Community and Further Education Board (Victoria) |
| AEMP | Advanced English for Migrants Program |
| ALBE | Adult Literacy and Basic Education |
| ALLP | Australian Language and Literacy Policy |
| AMEP | Adult Migrant Education Program |
| AMES | Adult Migrant Education Service |
| ANTA | Australian National Training Authority |
| CAE | Council of Adult Education (Victoria) |
| CALP | Commonwealth Adult Literacy Program |
| CES | Commonwealth Employment Service |
| CSDA | Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency |
| DEET | Department of Employment, Education and Training |
| DEETYA | Department of Employment, Education and Youth Affairs |
| DIMA | Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs |
| DSS | Department of Social Security |
| ELICOS | English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students |
| EPE | Employment Placement Enterprise |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| IEA | Intensive Employment Assistance |
| ILY | International Literacy Year |
| ITAB | Industry Training Advisory Board |
| LMP | Labour Market Program |
| MAATS | Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System |
| NCAELLS | National Collaborative Adult Language and Literacy Strategy |
| NQF | National Qualifications Framework |
| NTF | National Training Framework |
| NTP | National Training Package |
| NTRA | National Training Reform Agenda |
| OLMA | Office of Labour Market Adjustments |
| OTFE | Office of Technical and Further Education |
| PEPE | Public Employment Placement Enterprise |
| SIP | Special Intervention Program |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| VALBEC | Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council |

# Needs analysis in the adult ESL classroom

*Jill Bamforth*, Deakin University EdD Student

In the adult ESL classroom it is usual to begin a course by asking students to specify the 'needs', or topics and content areas they would like their English classes to cover, and to state their preferred learning activities. This is often done by way of a questionnaire with either individual or small group responses.

Not only is this 'needs analysis' a traditional starting point, but the term 'needs-based courses', meaning a curriculum which is responsive to learners' language objectives, rather than teacher, or institution-imposed ones, is a principle of language learning long enshrined in teaching practice and in curriculum materials.

This 'needs analysis' principle and ensuing activities appear to be consonant with liberal, democratic, adult learning theory. It seems a most fair and reasonable thing to do, and, if this were not enough, 'client needs analyses' are now requirements of Quality Assurance procedures. The whole approach is client centred and well-intentioned but unfortunately, it doesn't work.

The major difficulties teachers note about traditional needs analyses techniques are that many students regard course design as the teachers' responsibility, and, even should the students wish to have input into it, many of them, new learners especially, find the choice overwhelming--like choosing a meal from an unending menu.

Furthermore, teachers find that the information given by students in questionnaire form is often unreliable—quite different opinions may emerge in interviews, or shortly after a survey has been given. The most likely reason for this is that students do not understand the language, or the purpose of the questionnaire, or that they give the responses which they feel are expected of them. Then again, it may be that they have simply changed their minds.

Asking students to fill in one survey form as a small group activity is no guarantee, either, that the form will be understood, or that a fair sampling of opinions will be obtained. What can happen here is that the more dominant group member imposes her/his interpretations and opinions, a situation which can compound misunderstanding and resentment.

Then again, even if the information given in the survey were to be reliable, what is the teacher to do with it? For example, if nine students say that pronunciation is a priority for them, and three people nominate grammar, how does the teacher respond? Does she/he allocate more time to the teaching of pronunciation? Surely the rights of the 'grammar' respondents are as legitimate as those of the 'pronunciation' students, even if this group is numerically stronger.

It is perhaps the expectation of the pre-course questionnaire that students' needs are fixed, that language fits into neat headings, a bit like those usually found on a menu, and that students 'need' language in the same sense in which sustenance is 'needed'. I would like to question these assumptions and further, to suggest that the word 'need' is not an appropriate one to use in connection with language, and that its use sets up false and inhibiting expectations.

To begin with the first mentioned—that of 'fixed need'. One of the many problems associated with needs analysis, is that it assumes a single, unitary self, unaffected by changing circumstances. A post modernist view, on the other hand, would the 'self' as multiple- composed of layered, possibly conflicting desires. If needs analyses, then, are read from this perspective, students' responses can be seen, not as erratic, or unreliable, but simply as an expression of their many faceted selves.

Within ESL language has traditionally been divided into four macroskills and these have been further subdivided into smaller and smaller categories. These categories are not universal, nor do their descriptions remain unaltered over time. A teacher's definition of pronunciation, for example, might include rhythm and intonation, whereas a student's definition might refer to individual sounds. Reading, once seen as arriving at the given sense of a text, now recognises multiple meanings and possible interpretations. The relationship of the parts to the whole is a further source of confusion. One group—either teachers or students - may see the verb system as constituting grammar, for example.

Thus, fixing on what is meant by the terms we employ to describe the language--before we even get to students' preferences for classroom activities and resources, is a large task, one not easily encompassed in the first days or weeks.

And so to 'need'. What does it mean to 'need' English.? Does anyone 'need' English? If so, what for ? Are needs fixed? Do they constitute a sensible or practical basis for course design? What is the difference between a need and a want? If we talk about needs, what view of language and learning does that involve? What relationships does it set up between teacher and student, between student and student? Much, it seems, hangs upon 'need'.

To muse a little on the nature of need I would like to list some other, common applications of the word. Consider these:

1 What you need is a good thrashing

2 I need money

3 The car needs a service

4 All you need is love

In sentence 1, 'need' is associated with discipline, in a way which we would all find familiar. This may be externally imposed, as in the example, or self enforced- as in 'I need to lose five kilos'. Sentence 2 demonstrates an instrumental aspect of 'need'. Here, money is not, we understand, an end in itself, but something which provides other necessities. Sentence 3 is an example (as are sentences 1 and 2) of what Brindley (1989, p. 65) refers to as the 'lack', or 'gap', aspect of need. In the car service context, this means that there is a difference between the actual state of the car - hawking and spluttering in the morning, and the ideal state - post service, when it will run smoothly.

So far, 'need' has shown itself to be identifiable, rational, (in the sense that reasons for the need could be advanced, no matter how spurious) and quantifiable. The element of coercion or rigour—of effort perhaps, pertains to all of them Furthermore, they are all gaps, in the sense that once the requirement is provided—car service or thrashing—so the need should

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# Adult Education and Training

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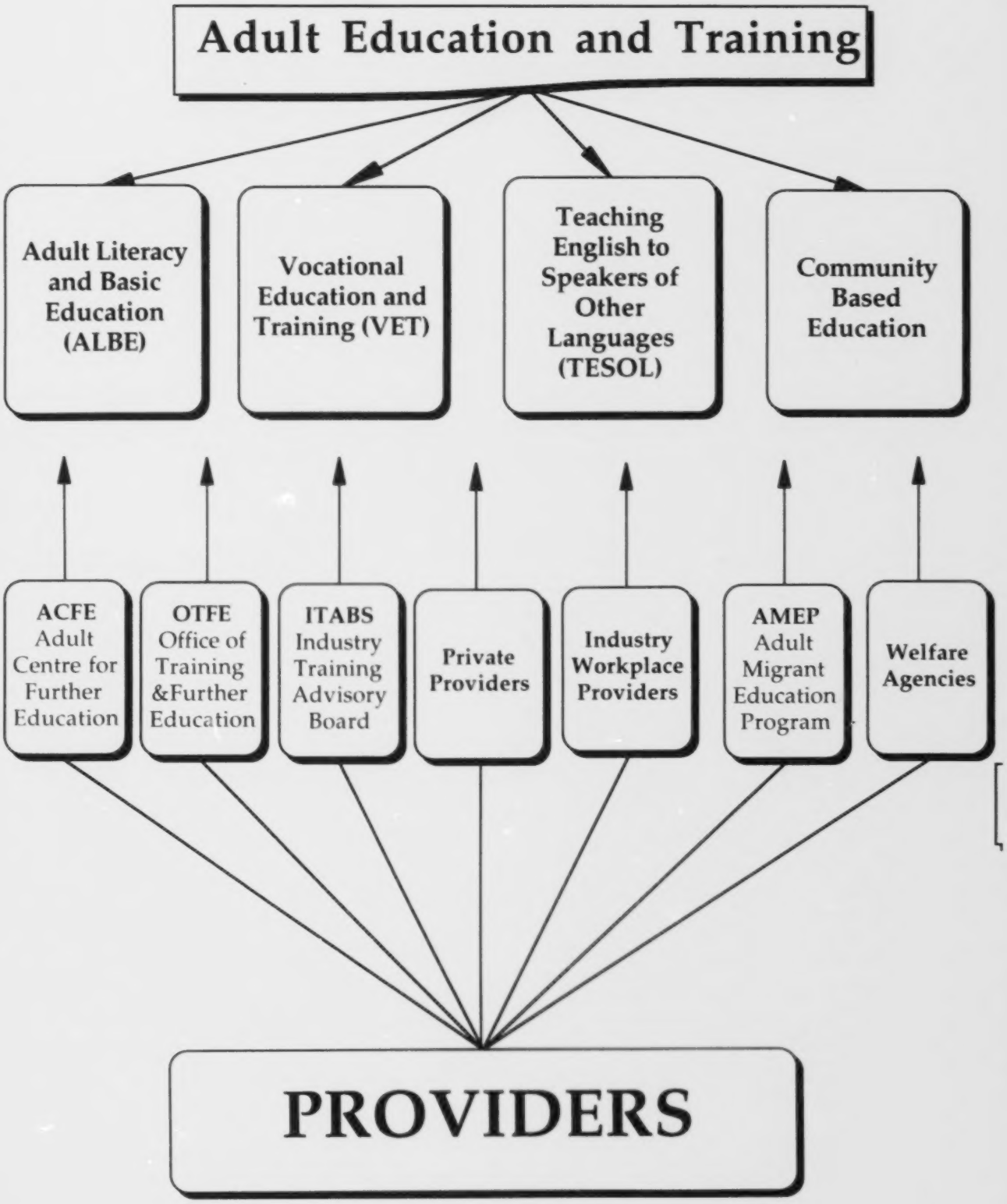
Adult Education and Training
Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE)
Vocational Education and Training (VET)
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
Community Based Education
ACFE Adult Centre for Further Education
OTFE Office of Training &Further Education
ITABS Industry Training Advisory Board
Private Providers
Industry Workplace Providers
AMEP Adult Migrant Education Program
Welfare Agencies
PROVIDERS

# Vocational Education & Training

## VET

**Vocational Education Training**
Whereas in the past many boys would attend technical secondary schools and leave school before Year 12 to take up an apprenticeship, this option has almost disappeared. Students are now expected to complete Year 12 before beginning their VET course. Recently schools have been offering TAFE VET courses in Year 11 & 12 hoping to develop a clear pathway for young people into VET. Traineeships whilst limited in numbers appear to be providing a successful VET option. The new MAATS and national Training Framework it is claimed will improve VET options, but again the numbers are limited.

### Key Policies and Reports

* 1987 Australia Reconstructed
* 1990 Finn Report
* Carmichael Report
* Mayer Report
* Australian Standards Framework
* Working Nation
* MAATS

### Curriculum and pedagogies

VET curricula have always been outcomes based, but in recent times there has been a shift away from the development of a craft knowledge in the master-apprenticeship relationship, to the modularisation of skill, breaking down skills into smaller units within a competency based framework. There has been a shift away from a time based system to a competency based system. There has been a proliferation of courses accredited under the ASF.

### Key Texts and Critique

Accredited Curriculum packages are now available for purchase in almost all vocational areas


Anderson, A.(1996) *Reading the Market: A Review of Literature on the Vocational Education Market in Australia*, CEET, Monash.

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# Adult Literacy and Basic Education

## ALBE

**Adult Literacy and Basic Education**
ALBE (ABE in some states) provides programs in basic literacy and numeracy skills and general and vocational educational programs designed to provide access into certificate courses in TAFE, to improve chances for employment and for lifelong learning. Most courses are held in community houses outside the main TAFE venues and in community based learning centres. Funding is available through ACFE and DEETYA for courses for unemployed people.

### Key Policies and Reports

* 1978 Come in Cinderella
* 1989 No Single Measure
* 1987 Lo Bianco Australia's Policy on Languages
* 1991 Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy, DEET, Canberra.
* Working Nation
* 1997 Australia's Literacies

### Curriculum and pedagogies

Self development and Lifelong learning have remained two key beliefs around which much ALBE practice has been constructed. In more recent times teachers have engaged with ideas of community development, participatory action research and critical literacy. The recent shift to the delivery of competency based certificates has been widely contested.
Teachers used to be responsible for their own curriculum development CGEA.

### Key Texts and Critique


ACAL/ACTA (1996) *Towards an understanding of Shifting Sands*, Australian Council of Adult Literacy, Australian Council of TESOL Associations.
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# Adult Literacy and Basic Education

## TESOL

**Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages**
Since 1947 immigrants and refugees have been entitled to free English classes to enable them to 'participate in the community', in terms of gaining work and for social needs.
In 1991 ALLP began a series of cut back entitlements moving towards time based and 'user pays' courses. The eighties saw rapid growth of ELICOS' private language schools to teach fee paying overseas students.
The main providers are the AMEP through a series of Centres in each state and in TAFE and Universities, providing more advanced English for specific purposes classes as well as general English.

### Key Policies and Reports

* 1978 Galbally Report
* 1986 Campbell Review Towards Active Voice
* 1987 Lo Bianco Australia's Policy on Language
*1988 Fitzgerald Towards Multiculturalism: A Commitment ot Australia
* 1991 Australia's Language and Literacy Policy
* 1997 Australia's Literacies

### Curriculum and pedagogies

The Australian field followed international patterns of development, beginning with the grammar translation approach, shifting to the communicative and self directed or learner centred approaches in the eighties. The field is characterised by extensive classroom research, networking across states and publications through NCELTR. In the nineties a shift to competency based language teaching was introduced with the CSWE

### Key Texts and Critique


ACAL (1996) *Understanding of Shifting Sands*, Australian Council of Adult Literacy, Australian Council of TESOL Associations.
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disappear as though it had never been. So what, then, of 'all you need is love'.

I propose that, in this sentence, 'need' is used ironically - the use of 'all' underscores this reading - and that its sense is strained for a particular effect-here, to impress the sense of love as something more than an extra in life's store cupboard. I say this, because 'love' does not fit well with the previous associations of 'need'. Whilst love may certainly be required for our psychological wellbeing, it also has aspects of spontaneity, generosity and reciprocity not otherwise encompassed by 'need'.

Just as the word 'need' is strained by its association with 'love', so it is strained by its association with 'language'. To speak of language in this way is to view it as a commodity, a menu item, something which, once acquired, need not trouble us again. This view of language is prominent in the checklist of functions which appears in even new language teaching publications—I can write a formal letter/ I can reserve a restaurant table. Checked off, home and hosed.

The 'commodification' view is enhanced by the addition of the word 'analysis'. This gives a scientific aura to the subject, and implies that discernible, material trends will emerge from the surveys which students undertake. This 'scientific 'approach cannot work, however, since the scope of language defies any attempt at this kind of restraint, the terms are not well-understood and there may, in fact, be no discernible trends at all (this has certainly happened in my experience), since the variables are so many.

And what of the relationships implied by a 'needs' view of language learning? Is the teacher the provider? And how do students relate to others whose needs are different from their own? Perhaps with some intolerance, for, if the point of language learning is only to meet needs, then why be involved in the needs of others?

In sum, a 'needs' view of language learning seems to be static and impoverishing. Although it seems to espouse liberal, democratic principles, it actually works against them by providing a narrow view of the self, of language and of relationships. Furthermore, it does not attempt to engage teachers or learners in any form of inquiry into the large, exciting, important questions which confront every class:

- What kind of knowledge is knowledge of a language?
- What implicit assumptions about this do people bring to classes?
- What motivates people to acquire language?
- How is it possible to negotiate a program of study which will satisfy all members of a class including the teacher?

Because people bring very different views to these subjects, there is a strong, almost inevitable possibility that these ideas might be in conflict. Therefore it is essential that these differences are negotiated and reconciled within the class. The process is a dynamic, on-going one, of reconciling the varying elements in the group with the course type requirements. An excellent example of this is provided in McKenna (1996), in a description of a course planning process which involved a constant revision of learning objectives.

It seems to be a question of recognising, and trying to develop in class, a sense of what lies behind the various language learning theories—behind tired old possibilities like product and process, for example. Perhaps language should be seen as a kind of map of reality—an ever expanding one—in which learners are attempt to colour in the central features - relationships, views of knowledge, views of language. This seems to me to be a much more interesting image than that of the teacher as the respondent to 'needs'—a doler-out of language requirements.

A good place to start is by recognising differences, rather than by levelling them out. Appendix one shows the very different information provided by a class who responded to the question 'Tell me about an English lesson which helped you.' I collated the responses and they were read as a class activity. Its particular value seemed to be in exposing members of the class to the fact that there were views other than their own. This survey might be followed up by pairing students whose views appeared to be very different and asking them to elicit more information about the learning activity which their partner described. From then on the possibilities are numerous, unpredictable, evolving. With language 'needs', however, the separate elements are soon over and done with—cut and dried, checked and listed.

**Acknowledgement**

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**Appendix 1**

**Students writing about the English lessons which they found most helpful**

Student 1: I like stories very much. My teacher gave me some stories and asked me what happened in the stories.

Student 2: An English lesson which I liked best was the one my teacher used books—first she explained the lesson and then she gave us a grammar exercise.

Student 3: The English lessons that I really liked were from my wife when we started going out together and she was teaching me how to speak properly. Because I fell in love with her I learned quickly how to speak, but my reading and writing is not good.

Student 4: English lessons are good forme when I write and read good books. 1. For example, when my teacher explains for me really well. 2. A really good lesson in the class was with my teacher and students when we were discussing together in the class. 3. A good English lesson for me is to go to the library and read the books after I finish my lesson and after the teacher finishes her class.

Student 5: One day I learned an English lesson that was good for me. The lesson helped me to go shopping and buy something I like, I was very happy then.

Student 6: A really good lesson for me was a lesson about nouns. The teacher used pictures. 2. A really good lesson for me was a lesson about pronunciation. The teacher used a recorder. A really good lesson for me was a lesson about objects. The teacher used a book and pictures. 4. A really good lesson for me was a lesson about grammar. The teacher used a grammar book. 5. A really good lesson for me was a lesson about countries. The teacher used pictures.

Student 7: When I have a conversation with a lot of my friends, for example, about movies and the cinema, I learn a lot of new words which I can catch in my brain. (Which I can remember.) Sometimes when I come to school the teacher is talking about her story—like how she came to Australia and when she was in her country, what happened in her life.

Student 8: When I watch TV and listen to radio I learn more English and also when the teacher uses a grammar book. I understand more words when I am talking with other people in English.

Student 9: When I was in Saudi Arabia there was a special program broadcast by The Voice of America and also I listened to the news in the English language from London. I really benefited from these programs and got a lot of information from them. It assisted my listening.

Student 10: An English lesson when I was ten was really good. My English teacher taught us English songs and poems instead of using the English book in the usual way. I was very happy. It was so exciting because it was so interesting. Throughout that English lesson I remembered many words and expression in a natural way.

# Reporting on student research into adult literacy

*John Hodgens*

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Over the past three years Deakin University has run an innovative off-campus unit entitled *Out of School Literacies*, which draws on the notion of 'multiple literacies'. This concept stresses literacy firstly, as multiple (i.e. 'literacies') rather than a single monolithic entity, and secondly as social practices related directly to specific contexts of social activity. It emphasises that literacies are diversified in modern complex societies, and considers the extent to which and the ways in which literacies rely on social practice itself, or social use.

One issue we examine in this unit is the influence of school literacy on people's perceptions of themselves as literacy users, i.e. as readers and writers. There is a basic question here of how, traditionally, the school has construed 'literacy'. By and large, most schools have traditionally constructed literacy as an abstracted monolithic set of *skills*, and as something that is defined in relation to school knowledge. However, while much complex 'literacy' is derived from schools and educational institutions, it is also the case that many complex forms are generated outside such settings. For this reason the unit also examines the kinds of reading and writing people do outside 'school'. Work situations are examined as sites of complex interaction and text production as are sports, hobbies and leisure activities.

The relation of the school to institutions beyond the school is complex. For the marginalised, the links between school literacies and those that occur in the world beyond the school are often quite tenuous. School literacies are likely to have little or no perceived 'relevance' to marginally literate people. This means that school based literacies have no sustained link to forms of literacy practice used in the broader institutional world. Elements of practices which the marginally literate have picked up in school up will almost inevitably lapse from lack of use.

It is important to note that, in fact, this situation is likely to apply to all of us to some degree. We follow activities that take our interest and frequently neglect other areas even when we feel we should know something about them e.g. current affairs and economics. Our literacies then tend to be fairly selective. Some literacies with which we once might have been conversant fall into disuse.

## Literacy

Many, if not most, people undertaking adult literacy courses have a low view of their levels of competence and frequently describe themselves as illiterate. Very few, however, are actually illiterate, and most are able to read a range of texts which they encounter in the course of everyday activities. Most also read with a deeper intensity certain texts which relate to a specific area of interest. When we consider these kinds of reading we find that many people labelled as 'illiterate' or 'marginal' are conversant with quite complex discourses and literacies.

Some two hundred students enrolled in *Out of School Literacies* over the last three years have participated in small research projects that ask them to locate someone who does not consider him/herself to be highly literate. The research task involves focusing on a special interest the interviewee nominates, and discussing a written text that relates directly to this area of nominated interest. Researchers are then asked to compare their own 'literacy' in the particular area nominated by the interviewee, and to compare their own general reading habits and practices with those of the interviewees.

It is evident that many of those interviewed are involved in specific group activities which provide them with broad supports for the kinds of reading that they do. Examples taken from student research include computers, car mechanics, cooking, gardening, a large array of crafts such as macrame and crochet, and hobbies and pastimes such as budgerigar breeding, ballroom dancing and a full range of sports such as fishing, football, horse racing etc. All of these activities are sites where complex texts are generated and used. It is very evident that the particular activity is significant to the person and is a principal means of achieving broader social participation and recognition. The activity becomes central to the person's identity and enables him or her to enter further into the activities of clubs or community groups.

The following observations are in many ways typical of what the researchers found. Here the interviewee has nominated horse racing or, more specifically, betting on the horses and has brought along the turf guide from a newspaper:

> Michael was surprised at how many words I had to ask him to explain to me. For himself, these words were basic, everyday language and I think he was slightly amused that a 'teacher' could not use them in their correct context... On the other hand, I noted that Michael was quick to refute any claims that he was an 'expert' or extremely knowledgeable in horse racing. It was as if he had been labelled as 'illiterate' so that he couldn't conceive of himself as literate in any area (from student research).

The researcher noted that textual complexity was not only in the 'content'. In this particular case, the racing form guide involved complex layout, headings and abbreviations. Michael had no problem with any of these features. The negative self perception is very commonly reported and indicates the degree to which perceptions derived from school exert a powerful and enduring influence. Marginally literate people can and do situate themselves meaningfully in relation to specific literacies. But there are problems. It is evident, for example, that writing is a major point of stress for many people--in which the moral stigma attached to the tag 'illiterate' becomes very real. Producing a written text becomes a point of maximum exposure. It is a point at which many people feel their basic social competence to be 'on the line'.

What then enables marginally literate people to read these texts? It is clear that text derives its significance and meaning in relation to broader social practice in which it is situated, and operates in ways which are immediately useful and evident to those taking part, as long as they are motivated to take part. Literacy practice, then, is an integral part of the overall practice and does something for the users.

From a skills perspective, marginally literate people lack some or all of the required *skills* such as phonemic awareness and decoding. From a practice perspective, literacy cannot be conceived of adequately as a neutral set of skills applicable to any situation. Literacy occurs as situated social practice. The marginally literate tend not to be 'multi-literate' but stay within a very selective and perhaps 'safe' range of literacies. From the research, selectivity is also a strong characteristic of those interviewed, especially when it comes to practices such as reading newspapers. Many people avoid political text, relying instead on TV and radio for information. Business and finance sections are not likely to be read. There is also a further question here of how articles are read—it is commonly reported that the reader tends to skim rather than read in depth, but this is a typical pattern of reading for most people. The question here would be what kinds of articles are read in depth?



Continued page 20

Articles which do seem to be commonly read are advertisements, fashion and lifestyle sections and sport. Gender differences also seem to be quite marked in this. The observations here are very general but there is a noticeable trend away from texts related to politics and areas openly associated with social power such as business and finance. Again the observation here is tentative but it is likely that technical complexity is often *not* the barrier. Literacy practices of marginalised people often centre on areas such as car mechanics and even computers, and many leisure or outside work activities involve complex texts. Reading then seems to be predominantly for informational and entertainment purposes. It would appear that marginally literate people are unlikely to read the kinds of texts that require reading between the lines. This is not to say that they do not have informed political orientations gained from personal experience and social discussion.

The basic issue for education then might be one of expanding the range of literacies that such people actually participate in. This would mean creating the conditions to enable participation in different kinds of group contexts. It is commonly reported that people often attend adult literacy courses as much for social purposes as educational ones. Participation must be real and requires sustained contact and involvement in networks of people doing things that are 'real' to them. The literacy practice should follow this involvement.

Adult literacy expanded rapidly in the final years of the Keating Labor Government and became linked with employment, and unemployment. It became an identifiable field in ways that it had not been before. During this period courses became increasingly subject to competency frameworks, and education institutions were forced into competition with each other. In Victoria, the Certificates of General Education for Adults were developed and marketed and applied across Australia. The definition of literacy as 'skills' is presupposed by these structures. Courses are expected to follow definite sequences with prescribed outcomes. The tendency, then is for the adult literacy scene to become more formal and more 'like school'. From the research and theoretical position outlined here it would seem that very different structures would be much more appropriate for adult learners.

# ALBE/ESL and the Net*

*Bill Daly*
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As an overwhelmingly symbolic and textual environment, the Internet obviously attracts the attention and interest of language and literacy educators. Adult English as a Second Language (Adult ESL) and Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) teachers are no exception. Many are finding the Internet a provocative and fascinating location for reflecting upon language use and language education. Many are probably also feeling a sense of unease about the already unrealistically wide brief of teaching 'language' and 'literacy' being even further expanded to cover this new and volatile textual domain.

Adult ESL education has had a reasonably long history of computer use. Most of this has involved dull and behaviourist CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) programs whose main claim to fame has been that they are able to capture and constrain both the computer and the solitary language learner at the same time. Needless to say, perspectives on language and literacy practices as involving the exchange of social meaning found these programs wanting as teaching or learning aids. Mercifully, the ALBE field was generally spared this digital torture, until recently...

It is puzzling to think that at a time of fairly widespread Internet access, this CALL tradition remains alive and well. Similar CD-ROM materials are still being produced and there is recent evidence of the CALL influence spreading across to the adult literacy field which is astounding when one considers the alternative opportunities for socially meaningful language practice available today through Internet communications. The advantages of Internet communications over CALL programs are much like those over mass media: they are open-ended and socially interactive, users are simultaneously readers and authors, and it's all much cheaper. Also there's the added benefit of the Internet acting as a source of texts which are authentic in the sense of having real functions outside the classroom.

Email and the World Wide Web (WWW) are the two main points of ALBE and adult ESL interest in the Internet. Their uses are fairly similar to those in other education sectors, such as the primary and secondary sectors. Examples of email use are setting up email pen friends, using mailing lists and undertaking collaborative research projects with other classes in different locations . WWW applications include browsing for information, researching using search engines, student authoring of web pages, collective authoring of class web sites, general curriculum delivery, and reading and writing of student electronic magazines

Adult students appear to take to the web more readily than they do to electronic mail. A part of the difficulty at my own workplace is that students have to use the Pine mail program running directly off the UNIX machine. Its very difficult, slow and unattractive compared to windows-based mail programs running from a local machine. In other providers, particularly community-based providers, students may have access to graphical email programs but through only one account shared by the whole class. There are also many other problems with using email and most of these relate to the difficulty students encounter in clearly determining a context for their email communication, especially that being sent to public student mailing lists. It is clear that teachers need to focus strongly on building and articulating a clear social and functional context for electronic mail communication in the classroom. That's probably why collaborative projects by pairs or small groups of classes using email seem to work the best.

The World Wide Web, on the other hand, has its own set of difficulties for adult English language and literacy teachers many of which are apparent to any web user; for example, the excess of information, the absence of any process for ensuring standards of quality and the predominance of US sites. Other features of web pages make them particularly difficult to incorporate into a literacy class built around the paper text: the confused and cluttered layout of many pages; the difficulty of navigating through a complex web which lacks the linearity of the book or the film and offers so many options; the length of many web pages and the absence of any contents or indices or similar keys to the text's real or potential organisation.

The adult ESL field has a much higher profile on the Internet than the ALBE field. There are many more resources on the web aimed at ESL students compared to those targeting ALBE students. There are also significantly more web pages written for and by ESL teachers than ALBE teachers. In addition, there are many more examples of ESL student-authored material than material produced by ALBE students and, finally, ESL student mailing lists carry a much larger amount of traffic than ALBE student mailing lists.

Its interesting to consider why this is so. The main cause appears to be related to each field's relative distance from the university, with its wealth of access to low-cost Internet communications facilities. ESL programs are common in universities here and in the United States,

while ALBE programs are not; their domain is the small neighbourhood house and community provider. With the rapid growth of cheap, non-university Internet service providers as well as the massive hikes in charges to universities for their data communications carried by Telstra, the inequality of access between the fields, at least in Australia, should improve somewhat. But the list of sites and resources below this article reflects the present imbalance in favour of adult ESL.

Another way that ESL students seem to be advantaged over ALBE students on the Internet is that their experience of recent migration seems to give them a sense of global scale, distance and perspective that may provide a ready vantage point from which to view and make sense of the Internet. Moreover, they also increasingly find themselves and their experience represented more on the net than on other media available in Australia today. For some ALBE students, however, there may be a sense in which the medium is not adding significantly to the quality of the text they want and need in their lives, but merely adding another more complicated means of accessing the existing corpus.

As a teacher deciding what to cover in my Internet communications classes with ALBE and ESL students, I have to be sensitive to such a position. The question of how to expend the very limited time resources that adult students have to devote to language learning is always a critical factor in these fields. Despite the fact that Internet communications software appears to be more simple today than in the past, it still takes some time to acquire the skills needed to use these programs, particularly if the student has very limited experience with personal computers and reading and using computer interfaces. Arguably, this time could be more effectively spent on developing the skills needed to deal effectively with conventional spoken and written texts. These are questions about which teachers and students must make up their own minds.

* A whole issue of the adult English language and literacy teachers professional journal, *Fine Print* was devoted to the issue of IT and Internet Communications last year. See June 1996 edition.

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# List of Internet Resources for ALBE/ ESL classes

(Addresses correct at 7.4.97)

## Hints on how to use email in classes

The archive of postings to Neteach-l on use of email in ESL classes
http://www.tnis.net/rbowers/neteach.html

### E-Mail Resources for English Language Learners

This is a list of sites for ESL students interested in communicating by email (and moo's)
http://www.tcom.ohiou.edu/OU_Language/englishEMail.html

## Established email projects

Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections
The IECC mailing list for linking ESL classes on the net
http://www.stolaf.edu/network/iecc/

### International E-mail Tandem and Forum Project.

An international ESL and bilingual email project. I don't know much about it.
http://www.enst.fr/~benenson/lgv/

### Ruth Vilmi/HUT Project

A lot of extensive global ESL student projects involving email
http://www.hut.fi/~rvilmi

Writing Around the World-Telecommunications and English-The Cities Project
Like the HUT Project which it collaborates with. This site looks at one particular international ESL student project around the theme of cities
http://www.nyu.edu/pages/hess/cities.html

### The OTAN Email Projects

A collection of email projects from the California Distance Learning Project
http://www.otan.dni.us/webfarm/emailproject/email.htm

## Websites of Email Lists

The E-Mail Key Pal Connection
Another ESL one
http://www.comenius.com/keypal/index.html

### The SL-lists

Email lists for post-secondary/adult ESL students.
http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/education/sl/sl.html

### The student email exchange at Dave's ESL Cafe

Dave's ESL Cafe <http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/eslcafe.html> has its own student email site
http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/student.html

### The ALRNNV ALBE student list

The student list run by the Adult Literacy Research Network Node of Victoria
http://dingo.vut.edu.au/~alrnnv/lists.html

## Email lists without websites

LEARNER:
I cut this from a website in the US
<.....
NYSERNET: is a moderated literacy discussion group for adult learners to practice their newly learned reading and writing skills by posting messages to the list which can be read by other new learners.

To join the list and receive mailings from LEARNER:
Send a message to
LISTSERV@nysernet.org (no subject necessary) saying:
Subject:
Message: subscribe LEARNER Jane Doe
2. For an experienced adult reader who would like to correspond with a new reader, as a mentor, this is your list.
3. Any questions should be directed to the list owner, Beverly Choltco-Devlin at the e-mail address mville3@nysernet.org

## Other ESL and ALBE Resources on the Web

Dave's ESL Cafe
A rich online resource for ESL students and teachers
http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/eslcafe.html

### Ruth Vilmi's home page

One of the best adult ESL sites
http://www.hut.fi/~rvilmi

### ESL Loop Sites

All the pages on the International ESL Loop
http://www.webring.org/cgi-bin/webring?index&ring=esloop

### Neteach-L

A great ESL discussion list
http://thecity.sfsu.edu/~funweb/neteach.htm

### English for Science and Technology

Resources for ESL Science/Tech teachers
http://lc.ust.hk/~est/est1.html

### Volterre-FR English and French Language Resources

One of the most comprehensive ESL sites
http://www.wfi.fr:80/volterre/home.html

### Web Wide Web Activities that Work (and why)

A presentation on using the web in ESL classes from the US TESOL 96 conference
http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/resources/TESOL/WWW_Activities.html

### Creating web pages for effective student learning

An even better presentation by the same team at the 97 conference
http://deil.lang.uiuc.edu/resources/TESOL97/PCI/

### @lbe ELECTRONIC

A new site for adult literacy students in Melbourne
http://www.vicnet.net.au/~twt/frontpage.html

### Darlinghurst Gaol

Actually a college in Sydney with a great ALBE site
http://www.pip.com.au/~abestuds/

The adult_literacy teacher list
How to subscribe to the adult_literacy teacher list here in Melbourne
http://dingo.vut.edu.au/~alrnnv/lists.html

# Cultural narratives of ageing or How old is the adult in adult education?

*Barbara Kamler*
**Deakin Centre for Education and Change**

As this issue of *Changing Education* is devoted to the theme of Adult Education I want to reflect a moment on the words 'adult education'. 'Who are the adults we imagine when we say this phrase? Are they men or women? How old are they? As old as 40, 50, 60? What about 70 or 80? At what stage do we think adults stop learning? Do we think adults can be too old to learn? What about at age 90? Do we see the post-retirement years as a time of growth as well as loss? Do mental and creative facilities necessarily decline with age?

I raise these questions to encourage readers to consider how their own notions of adult education might be shaped by ageist discourses. In a recent discussion with women aged 65-90, I asked how a university might cater for their needs? What, I asked, did they want as learners? One recurring answer was that they wanted to be taken seriously. Many of the women were enrolled in University of the Third Age courses, which by reciprocal agreement entitled them to audit selected units at the University of Western Australia. While they were appreciative of the opportunity, they did not, they said, simply want to audit. They wanted to do the hard work—assignments, essays, reading, tutorial presentations—in short, they wanted to be assessed and judged in terms of their output—like their younger associates. They wanted to be taken seriously as learners rather than treated as dilettantes who taste from the smorgasbord of educational offerings, like ladies who lunch.

The women were participants in a collaborative research project called 'Stories of Ageing' where their knowledges and experience were the object of our study. Their comments alerted me to the profound ways in which our educational practices marginalise older women as learners. When we don't think of ageing itself as a process of change and possible growth—it is difficult to embrace the idea that older women and men might want to engage in serious study. But this is exactly what the women demonstrated in their determined and passionate engagement in our writing workshops.

We worked together in the workshops to confront the narrow range of negative images of ageing pervasive in our culture, and to provide an opportunity for older women to explore in writing how their stories might challenge and disrupt conventional storylines of women and ageing. The aim was to produce what Bronwyn Davies (1994) calls 'collective biography': stories of each woman's experience which speak to larger cultural issues shared by women engaged in the process of ageing. The women, however, were not writing autobiography as an end in itself, but as a means of developing a collective understanding of the discursive processes that have shaped ageing women. Through the process, women can, according to Davies (1992, pp. 83-84), 'examine the construction of their own biography as something at the same time experienced as personal and their own—woven out of their body/minds—and yet visibly made out of, even determined by, materials and practices not originating from them'.

To date, my colleague Susan Feldman, Director of the Alma Unit on Women and Ageing, and I have worked with three groups of women aged 58-90. The writing workshop groups met for six weeks in weekly two hour sessions from May-June and August-September, 1994 and during a four day intensive in March 1995. There were thirty eight participants in all, eleven in the first group, seven in the second, twenty in the third, representing a predominantly white middle to lower-middle class population from a range of Eastern European and Anglo Celtic origins. Our approach called on memory work as developed by Frigga Haug (1987), a method of inquiry which is collective and deconstructive, where participants produce data in the form of stories and subject these data to a progressive critical process of reading and theorising. Our work differed from Haug in that we worked for a much shorter period of time with women who did not identify as academic or feminist and we sometimes set writing topics on particular themes that emerged from our discussions.

From the beginning the workshops were clearly articulated as a social and political project which aimed to disrupt negative and limiting storylines of ageing. We worked hard to establish a shared sense of purpose that encompassed the individual but went beyond her—that relocated autobiographical texts in the social and cultural practices in which they are embedded. Such purposes are often absent in adult education settings where student language is treated as neutral or where the personal is used primarily as a motivation to lure students into learning to write and read text.

Our purposes were clearly feminist and transformative and we were explicit about these. As workshop leaders, we took seriously the fact that there are presently few storylines available to women outside traditional narratives of lost youth and physical deterioration; we looked to the women to provide alternative storylines which could sit alongside and challenge dominant representations. Our aim was also to teach the women new writing strategies, but such writing purposes were framed within our larger social purposes.

The workshops were successful to the extent that the women used our resources to build a politics of their own. That is, our sense of purpose was taken up by group members but transformed by them. It was the women, for example, who taught us that ageing is a continuum, characterised by diversity and difference. Through their writing and discussion, they refused the cultural construction of the older woman as an undifferentiated category—as other. Furthermore, they challenged our romantic tendency as workshop leaders to valorise the positive aspects of ageing, to replace images of weakness with images of courage; hopelessness with optimism, powerlessness with power. They refused to create new dualisms of superageing, where storylines of fit, creative, physically active, adventurous ageing become the new unachievable oppression. Ageing was not one thing or the other; it encompassed a multiplicity of positions some of which were not pleasant.

This work will continue during the next three years through an Australian Research Council Grant (1997-99) where Terry Threadgold (Monash University), Susan Feldman (Melbourne) and I (Deakin University) will work with women 70-85 in both writing and video workshops. One of the major conceptual shifts from the earlier work is to frame this project as a longitudinal study of women's self representation. Rather than assume

nothing happens after 70, we will look for change and growth over time- both positive and negative. While it is common to examine change in the lives of young people, so entrenched is the cultural expectation that age is about decline or death, that longitudinal studies of the social and cultural aspects of ageing are rare. Our aim is to counter the invisibility of older women by positioning them as agents and collaborators in intellectual work, thereby challenging commonplace notions that creative and cognitive ability decline with age and that age itself is a 'problem'. By studying the written texts and video diaries the women produce over the three years, we hope to learn more about issues of identity and representation in growing older.

What is certain is that we have a great deal to learn from older women. To demonstrate, the remainder of this article presents the writing of some of the women we have worked with. There is power in their cultural narratives of ageing to teach, confront, amuse and shake up our 'ageist' assumptions. There is power as well in workshops which provide older women with a challenging intellectual community where they are taken seriously. This was made poignant in a recent interaction with the daughter of one of the workshop participants. Below I reproduce her monologue from memory. The setting was a literary lunch during Senior Citizens Week, 1997.

> 'You don't know me. My mother was Joan Strachan. She died six months ago. She received an invitation to this lunch and I just had to come. You have no idea how important your writing workshops were for my mother. We knew she was happy to attend and she loved writing. But we didn't know what she was writing. She never showed us. When she died and we went into her computer and found her stories, we were amazed. We used one at her funeral—it was read as part of the elegy service. I thought you'd like to know'.

## *She looked in the mirror, and what did she see?*

### Leila Joan Strachan

Had it been made of bronze and on a pedestal it would have been called a bust; but it wasn't bronze. It was a flesh and blood reflection—the head, neck and shoulders of a wrinkled old woman.

She could see it all too clearly. It was all very well for her husband to have put an extra bright light over the bathroom mirror so he could see to shave and trim his moustache, but that light did show up every wrinkle, spot and blemish.

The head was not big, only 21 inches; such trouble she used to have buying hats when hats were an essential item of one's wardrobe. Hats would fall down over her eyes which was embarrassing in front of those superior sales ladies. She hopes that a small head doesn't mean she is narrow minded.

Better not look too closely at the hair, poor wispy grey hair, a legacy form her father's family. But at least she wasn't bald like Great Aunt Kate. The forehead, yes plenty of wrinkles there, but, thank goodness, not that anguished frown brought on by those awful migraines. Old age certainly has its compensations and no more migraines is definitely a compensation.

Brown eyes like her father's, maybe a bit faded now, but still basically brown. It's funny but only two of her children have brown eyes. The colour doesn't matter when she remembers what her lucky eyes have seen—new born babies, gorgeous sunsets, Uluru and the Red Centre, the fern gullies of Tarra Valley. They have seen famous people—the Duke and Duchess of York in 1927, Kingsford Smith and Mother Teresa; and the acts of artistic and athletic brilliance—the Russian Ballet, Don Bradman, Billie Jean King, Imran Khan and Gary Ablett.

Her ears are big and have very tiny lobes, so that screw-on earrings are horribly uncomfortable, but the thought of self-mutilation was even more horrible, so she never succumbed to fashion. A cousin told her once that small lobes were a sign of low mentality, but fortunately two of her daughters have very small lobes and they have both achieved academic excellence--so that fixes that old furphy. She is full of gratitude for what those ears have heard, music in particular, but also the song of magpies and blackbirds, words of wisdom from many people, poetry recited by Richard Burton, the humour of the Goons and of course, conversations with family and friends.

The nose- the family nose. 'Oh Grandma, what a big nose you've got'. 'All the better to smell with my dear'. It's a funny thing that although the nose seems to be getting bigger, the sense of smell seems to be fading. But what memories are recalled by that nose, Boronia, her mother's favourite flower, the smell of wet earth after rain, coffee and spices in an old fashioned grocer's shop, and the terrifying smell of bushfires.

The mouth—from the mouth (and boy is she a talker) comes speech and also song. There are many happy memories of singing four part harmonies to the Hallelujah Chorus with her sisters and brothers when driving in the car. Solo singing was always confined to songs over washtubs in the laundry or singing nursery rhymes to children and grandchildren.

The neck, oh dear, it looks even longer and scraggier than ever, like an emaciated emu, but no matter, that's what skivvies, high necked shirts and scarves are for. Well all in all, it's no thing of beauty, but it has lived, it shows signs of having lived, and she can be grateful for how it has lived. There is still a lot of living to be done, so just don't stand there gazing into the mirror, straighten those shoulders and go out and do something.

## *She let herself go*

### Lillian Thorpe

She felt the throb of the music through the pavement as she walked aimlessly through the outer city streets. Like a background to her thoughts the tune blended into her subconscious and she found herself repeating the phrase in rhythm to the beat... 'You wouldn't have a clue... you wouldn't have a clue..'.

They had been arguing again and this time she had to admit to herself that he had been right. He had accused her of becoming dowdy. Maybe it was because he had been in the company of younger people that day when, as a volunteer guide he taken a group of aspiring lab students over the ice cream factory where he had worked until retirement.

He had come home as usual about six o'clock and found her finishing the ironing in the laundry. She looked tired in spite of having had a fairly uneventful day. The dress she wore was at least ten years old, a faded Osti she had brought at a Coles sale. She couldn't throw it away because it was so comfortable. Her hair was still in rollers simply because she had forgotten to take them out and her glasses were smudged with tiny specks of Fabulon. The well worn fluffy slippers protruded from under the ironing board where the cat had positioned itself against the pink fur.

She looked up and smiled at him, asked him how his day had been. 'Alright', he said.
He seemed to be looking at her in a new light.

> 'How long have you had that dress?' his eyes seemed to say. But his voice said 'Don't you like that dress I bought you for your birthday?'
> 'Of course I do—why?'
> 'Well you never wear it'.
> 'What- around the house?'
> 'Why not--you never go anywhere'.

There was an edge of irritation in his voice and she found herself taking a defensive position. She rested the iron in it's cradle and turned off the switch. She wondered what had brought on this somewhat critical attitude towards her appearance. As he followed her back into the kitchen, he watched her still shapely buttocks moving beneath the fabric of the old blue frock. He wished she would wear a belt to define her trim waist.

That dress I bought you has a belt. Is that why you don't wear it?' he asked.



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She was getting annoyed. He's going to keep on about it, she thought. She tapped instructions into the microwave and headed for the bathroom hoping to escape further interrogation.

But he was warming up to the subject. She stepped out of her clothes and turned the shower on while he stood outside the partly closed door and continued the tirade. Through the drumming of the shower she caught snatches of commentary:

> 'Old fashioned... too conservative... time you spruced yourself up a bit...' Then when no response was evoked... 'You wouldn't have a clue...'

The microwave beeped five times and he went to retrieve whatever she had prepared for dinner. She stepped out from the shower and towelled herself dry. Then in a kind of daze she opened the wardrobe door and automatically reached for her old chenille dressing gown. His words were still in her ears '...spruce yourself up a bit...'

She swept the gown on it's hanger to the side and withdrew the frock he had given her. The soft blue silk slid easily across her fingers. She put it on over her best underwear, not really knowing what her intentions were. She removed the rollers and reflected that her loose hair softened her face. She held the comb in mid air in a moment of indecision then swept her hair back in a neat bun. After all she was sixty five.

With his comments still echoing in her head, she walked out the front door and strolled aimlessly towards the outskirts of the city. She paused at a shop window and saw the severe reflection of her face in the glass. The music was getting through her now. She removed the hairpins from her bun and loosened her hair. It fell in soft cascades to her shoulders and she smiled at the effect.

Without really knowing why, she sought out the source of the music and found herself entering a brightly lit dance hall. Before she knew it someone had grabbed her hand and pulled her into a Congo line. She was swept along in a throng of laughing dancing people. The blue dress floated prettily as she held the waist of person in front of her. She felt a pair of hands on her hips and laughed inwardly as she let herself go with the magic of the moment.

## *No*

### Kaye Hastings

I have found a strength I never ever had and that strength lies in my ability to say **NO.** This could be the cause of riotous laughter, depending on your concept but it has been the bane of my life.

Yes! is a positive word and as the dictionary says 'not negative' something I have tried to be all my life. Now in my tenderest years, I find that there is a reversal of meaning. No becomes the positive word, an affirmation that I now have the power to say it.

No longer am I Miss Goody Two Shoes. If the baby sitting is inconvenient I say so. No juggling or postponing commitments. No more taking on official positions—where no-one else will oblige. No helping when my children are in dire straits. I don't know where to stop, the list is so endless.

The beauty of this exercise is I can say yes if I want to. But saying 'No' gives me such power within myself, that my inclination is to say 'Yes'. (Kaye Hastings)

## *Living Together/Living Alone*

### Frances Creasy

He draws the curtains'. Wake up! Time for our morning walk'. They walk in the early morning. Walk together. Hands together. Walk together in the rain. Walk together in the wind, in the sun.

I never walk in the park now.

She makes coffee. Coffee for two. She grinds the beans. Fills the pot with rainwater and when it has perked she pours coffee into two cups. Two cups of freshly ground coffee.

I make coffee. Coffee for one. Powdered coffee.

He opens the garage doors. He leans through the car window. He presses the horn. He waits. Waits for her. They leave together. Together in the car.

I leave the house. The garage doors are shut. I have no car. I walk to the bus stop.

She is in the kitchen. It is early evening. Her head is bent over an old tattered cookbook. His mother gave her the cookbook on her wedding day. There are pots on the stove and the faint odour of garlic as she lifts a lid.

I don't use garlic. I don't like the way the taste seems to linger. I don't bother to cook much. Not for myself.

She brings the dish to the table. A table laid for two. They sit together at the table. She waits for him to taste the dish she has brought to the table. She smiles when he nods his approval.

I don't bother to lay the table. If I'm hungry, I make some sort of sandwich and eat it as I wander about the house. But often I don't even bother to do that.

They are in the kitchen. In the kitchen together. He talks as she wipes the dishes she has washed. Tells her it was a good meal cooked just the way he likes it. She is happy he likes her cooking.

With no cooking I've no dishes to wash and wipe.

She looks through the T.V times. She tells him that cricket is on at eight. At eight they watch cricket. They watch cricket together. Together on the sofa.

I don't care for cricket. I don't care to watch any sport except tennis, and then, not for hours and hours on end. I sit alone. Alone on the sofa, often until the early hours watching old films.

They are in the bedroom. The bedroom has a king size bed. He is in the bed. She is in the bed. The king size bed they bought together. They are in the bed they bought together.

I am in bed. In a king size bed. I am in bed alone.

He moves towards her. She moves towards him. They are together, close together in the middle of the king size bed.

I am alone in the middle of the king size bed. I move a pillow. I move the pillow close as I see them together.

I see the look on his face. I hear his words. I see the look on her face as she hears the words.

I bury my head in the pillow. I don't want to hear the words. The words he speaks but the pillow does not stop me from hearing the words. The words he speaks.

The words 'I'm leaving'.

## *Meditation*

### Bobby Rhine

I enter into the silence
meditating.
It is a world without pain
without you.

The waves of peace
wash over me
and when I emerge
alone, I can exist.

I sleep without you to turn to
and wake to another day
of mundane things
small tasks
the herbs touched in
benediction.

I dream of the silence
to be wrapped in black velvet
meditating.

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# ADAM'S STORY

*Pamela Bartholomaeus*

## Preamble

This short paper is about Adam and about his mother Sue. It is a story of Adam's[1] difficulties learning literacy, and about Sue's[2] disappointments and frustrations during the past eight years trying to get Adam the kind of assistance he required. It is also a story about the ways in which 'literacy problems' might be constructed in school settings and lay the ground for the kind of literacy problems some adult learners may face in later life. While Adam is not yet the subject of adult education, his story leaves us wondering what kind of literacies he will need to develop later in life.

Recently I was directed by the School Council of our local primary school to prepare a letter to the state's Minister of Education of Education and Children's Services conveying serious concerns about the short-fall in their provision of psychological testing and speech pathology services to the school's students. In preparation for writing, the staff suggested I talk with Sue about her personal concerns and frustrations as a parent of a student with special needs. This paper is the result of that conversation. Sue's story was included with the letter to the Minister to help put 'human flesh' on the facts and figures revealed in the school audit of unmet needs among our school's students.

Adam has an older sister who is excelling at school. His family own a farm approximately 20 kilometres north of our town, and he travels to school daily by bus. Like many farms today, little or no extra labour is employed, with most work carried out by the husband and wife. Also, like most farming businesses, financial pressures have been a reality since the late 1980s.

In telling the story of Adam, I wish to acknowledge those teachers who have worked to the best of their professional ability for Adam, and who have assisted and encouraged Sue. They are teachers I also know, and who, as a fellow teacher, I hold in the highest esteem. They will remain anonymous in this story. No story of a child and their learning experiences is a simple journey forward. My telling adds a layer of interpretation - a desire to add alternative insights, 'if only' comments, and asides, which interrupt the telling. There is an alternative story which is available to families whose finances and geographical location are not an impediment to action. Alternatives are also more available to parents who 'know the system' better, and know when and how to 'push' to get the services from DECS which they believe their children need. For these reasons seam lines are inserted periodically in the story, and a different font is used to interrupt the immediacy of the tale of Adam's effort to learn literacy.

## The story

Sue became worried about Adam's progress when he was in Year 1. She particularly noticed that he was experiencing problems learning to read. Adam's teacher was supportive of Sue and her concerns for Adam and encouraged Sue to speak to a teacher who was responsible for Special Education in the school. The latter teacher encouraged Sue to take Adam to an optometrist who prescribed glasses, and recommended that Adam also see an occupational therapist. Sue received some helpful advice from these two professional people, has maintained contact with them, and continues to help Adam do exercises they prescribed.

Adam's Year 1 teacher also recommended that he be assessed by a Guidance Officer. Unfortunately the teacher was absent the day the Guidance Officer came, and Sue was not notified that her son was to be seen, or had been seen by the Guidance Officer that day. The report from the Guidance Officer stated that Adam had no particular problems, an assessment with which the teacher disagreed.

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*At this point a parent request to meet with the Guidance Office would have been a good idea. At such a meeting Sue could have received an explanation for the assessment made of Adam. The teacher's disagreement with the assessment could have been made public.*

*Alternatively, a second opinion purchased from a professional outside of the Education Department would be a constructive move for a parent in Sue's position.*

---

Sue was sufficiently concerned about the difficulties Adam was experiencing at school to discuss the question of his promotion for the next school year. She negotiated with his teacher and the Principal to have Adam retained in the same class for a second year. Adam repeated Year 1 in a combination class, with many of his peers doing Year 2 work. This decision gave Adam three years and two terms in Junior Primary classes[3].

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*The decision to have Adam spend an extra year in Junior Primary occurred because Sue learnt that parents could request their child not be promoted and initiated discussions. Without this knowledge Sue is sure that Adam would have been automatically promoted.*

*The extra year as a Year 1 student represented a good opportunity for Adam to spend time consolidating the literacy skills which students are expected to learn in the Junior Primary years. He then had the opportunity to later progress into a standard Year 3 class and work at the same level as other peers. However, as Adam's Year 1 teacher explained to Sue, she and her fellow teachers do not have the training to understand specific learning difficulties or to work with students with these problems. Unfortunately Adam also had not had any specific learning difficulties identified in the assessment by the Guidance Officer. Although Adam benefited from this extra year, possibly it was not utilised as well as it might have been.*

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Adam is described by Sue as having been a restless student. Adam's parents took him to see Dr Harry Nash[4] when he was in Year 2. Adam was diagnosed as being ADD, and medication was prescribed. The medication helped Adam's behavioural problems, but his learning difficulties persisted. Sue pointed out that a positive result of the ADD being well managed was that Adam's self-esteem improved at that time, and this improvement has been sustained to the present.

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*This would have been an excellent point at which to request another assessment by a Guidance Officer or to take Adam to SPELD or a privately practicing psychologist for assessment. It would have given the school information on the nature and severity of Adam's learning disabilities, plus guidance on the activities which would be of most assistance to his learning.*

---

As a result of the consultations with Harry Nash, Adam's parents applied for a Disability Allowance. This allowance was granted, and continues to be received, based on the extra time Sue needs to spend working on eye and occupational therapy exercises and the remedial home tutoring which Adam requires. Sue is thankful for this extra money which she has used to pay for the medication, specialists' fees, and for some extra tutoring. Adam was tutored at school by a member of the community who worked with him on a one-to-one basis several times a week. This assistance ceased when several problems arose. Some parents were unsure that it was fair that one student was receiving much more assistance than other students'. Also the school became concerned about the issue of individuals receiving privately paid remuneration for work they were carrying out on school property without appropriate insurance

cover. After this private arrangement ceased Adam received minimal LAP assistance over the next twelve months. Sue knew that Adam was experiencing problems learning literacy, but felt powerless to do better for her son.

*One of Adam's peers, who was also experiencing literacy learning difficulties was taken to SPELD by his parents during Year 2. The SPELD report detailed this child's difficulties, and the school at this point organised extra classroom assistance for the student, based on this private assessment.*

As Sue looks back, a major frustration is the response she got at the start of each school year from Adam's new class teacher. Each teacher in turn seemed to have a similar question - 'Why hasn't Adam been assessed?'. Sue's perception, as a result of these conversations, was that Adam should have been nominated for assessment at the end of the previous year and that the start of the new school year was too late. Each year, after several months of adapting to their new class the teacher felt more comfortable coping with Adam in the class. Adam worked on materials with lower levels of difficulty than did his peers, and achieved lower levels of success.

*Some parents, for example those who are teachers, know that they are able to request an assessment of their child by a Guidance Officer at any time. Sue however, did not have this knowledge, and was worried that she would be seen by the school as being too pushy as a parent. She was also concerned that there were other students who had more severe difficulties than Adam.*

In August 1995, as a Year 5 student, Adam's parents took him to SPELD for an assessment[7]. The report prepared at SPELD detailed a range of learning difficulties being experienced by Adam. His parents were supplied with a list of activities and measures to help him overcome these problems. The assessment indicated that Adam, who was 11 years old at the time of the assessment, had a reading age of 7 years and 3 months. It detailed problems with coding, eye-hand coordination, visual memory, and auditory analysis. The testing also indicated that Adam had difficulty with whole word recognition, particularly of sight words, and continuing problems with the alphabet, as he was unable to give the sounds and names of some letters. His scores for verbal reasoning and vocabulary were at the bottom of the average range.

There were two immediate outcomes of the SPELD assessment for Adam. Firstly, as a result of the assessment, the school included him in LAP. Adam also became part of a group in his class, who were assisted in the classroom for about one hour per day by a School Services Officer, and the work attempted was concentrated mainly on spelling and language tasks. Secondly, Adam's parents were informed that a SPELD tutor lived in the district. Adam has since been taken by his mother to work with this tutor. Initially these visits were weekly, now it is often fortnightly. This program involves considerable expense and travelling[8]. The tutoring is timed to occur during the lunch break and into the school's afternoon program as Adam is too tired for such a program after school hours.

Sue is thankful that she and her husband are able to afford the financial commitment at this stage, and she is pleased with the results evident in Adam's learning.

*Sue is disappointed that it has taken so many years for her and her husband to make the financial commitment to the SPELD assessment, and to the tutoring by a person recommended by SPELD.*

*SPELD is a provider of a specific approach to teaching a range of skills which can assist in the learning of functional literacy. It is also an organisation which is known in the community for its work assisting with children's learning difficulties. Sue had no knowledge of alternative sources of assessment and assistance for her son which she could have accessed. There are numerous other rural parents in the same position as Sue.*

There were several other outcomes of the assessment from SPELD. One was a recommendation by the school that Adam be assessed by a speech pathologist. This referral was made in September or October 1995. However, his teacher later reported to Sue that there was no chance of Adam receiving help from the speech pathologist as his parents were already paying for help. There was no official contact between the speech pathologist and Sue at the time. This referral is now being pursued again. Adam also was recommended by his teacher to be assessed by a Guidance Officer after the assessment from SPELD. This referral was approved, and he was to be assessed by a psychologist employed via the DECS out-sourcing process. This psychologist looked in Adam's file, said that he would recommend the same tests as were conducted in the SPELD assessment and that this was a waste of time. He recommended that the class teacher discuss a possible program for Adam with a Guidance Officer. Sue was able to attend the resultant meeting with the Guidance Officer, and was disappointed to hear that there is no extra money to give assistance unless the student has a severe intellectual disability. It was suggested instead that the class teacher work out a suitable program herself.

*Sue's questions in relation to the recommendations of the Guidance Officer are:*

- *how can an already overworked teacher do this?*
- *how can teachers be expected to this when they are not trained to work out programs for students with specific learning disabilities?*

*Sue argues that the recommendation that class teachers be responsible for developing programs for students such as Adam seems a heavy load for teachers already coping with larger class sizes, and many students with individual needs. This is especially the case when a student such as Adam has at least three areas of learning difficulty which need to be addressed.*

In 1995 Adam participated in the Basic Skills Tests. His participation was at Sue's encouraging. She perceived that many poor students were opting not to complete these tests, and thus a true picture of the capabilities of the student population was not going to emerge. Adam's participation was a form of protest, motivated by a desire to show DECS[9] that there were students who were not 'coping'. When the results were released Adam had not been allocated a position on the literacy band, or on the reading band, as he had not been able to correctly answer enough questions. The letter accompanying the results of the Basic Skills Tests asked the parent to contact the teacher or the Principal to discuss a learning program for the student[10]. Sue did this. Still, the fact that Adam does not suffer from a severe intellectual disability, means that the school is unable to offer him, or seek from DECS, any further assistance.

*I was amazed to learn that a 'no band allocation' was a possible assessment for a student to receive from the Basic Skills Tests.*

*Sue is unable to understand why money is being spent on Basic Skills Tests if there is no money to provide assistance to those students shown to be seriously in need. For Sue the logical outcome of such a process must be allocation of resources and programs to cater for the student needs which are identified by the testing procedure.*

*The Basic Skills Test, and the*

*SPELD assessment in 1995, showed that the concerns which Sue had held for Adam's learning for the previous six years were well founded. The report from the Basic Skills Test results certainly 'helped parents and teachers identify where [Adam] needs extra help'[11]. Sue now wants to know what DECS is able to provide to Adam's school to make that extra help, which clearly is required by Adam, a possibility.*

Adam is currently almost half way through Year 6, and working hard to learn digraphs and blends, and a range of coping strategies. Sue, with the assistance of the SPELD tutor, is becoming increasingly well informed about ways of teaching her son the intricacies of spelling and reading, and assisting him to cope with work set in class which assumes an independently literate student.

However, for Sue and her husband, and for Adam too no doubt, there is the question of his progress through to the end of Year 7. There also is the important question of how he is going to cope with the literacy demands of secondary education. Sue is maintaining a file of all the assessments and correspondence relating to Adam's difficulties in readiness for when he begins the SACE[12]. Adam also needs to prepare for an adult working life which will require the ability to read and utilise a range of texts which inform working practices and applications of new methodologies and technologies in the rural sector.

## A Postscript

Sue reports, a year after our first conversation about her son, that Adam is now doing more reading and most homework independently, and that he is no longer receiving any SPELD tutoring. Adam is completing his homework and seeking help with the few parts he cannot do himself. School projects are the most difficult tasks for Adam, and he is unable to do these independently, but instead works on reading through the reading with Sue, who then writes a rough draft for him. This indicates that despite good progress Adam still falls well short of being able to complete tasks requiring literacy abilities that will be expected of him during the remainder of his education.

Sue and Adam will continue to be perplexed by the "What if" questions about his early years of schooling. Questions can also be asked about the benefits to Adam of participating in the Basic Skills Tests. For Adam there were no further resources directed to him as a conclusion to the process. Adam's test results instead have merely contributed to the literacy profile of a school which does not have adequate resources or the specific professional training to meet the needs of a diverse student population, despite the efforts of a dedicated group of teachers and a large number of volunteer parents.

Sue concluded her conversations with me by asking an important question: What happens with students from low socio-economic families? This is an important question. It is also a question which has constrained Sue and the demands she has felt able to make of the school since she first became concerned about Adam's progress. She is conscious of the resources she and her husband have been able to make available to assist Adam, which other parents may not have.

Adam's future, as a student, and as a literate adult member of the community, are still a concern. He will need to continue to develop literate abilities at a faster rate than his peers, for the next few years, if he is to avoid an adult life constrained by limited literacies. A future with limited literacies will pose serious difficulties as Adam takes control of an agricultural business influenced by international events and increasingly complex technologies. Yet Adams story is one of hope and persistence

**Acknowledgement**

I thank Adam and Sue for willingly sharing this story.

**Notes**

1. The names of the student and his mother are both fictitious.
2. Adam's father rarely appears in this story, as it is written as a response to an initial telephone conversation I had with Adam's mother. His father has been equally concerned with his son's progress. Due his father's work commitments most extra literacy work at home, and conversing with teachers, has been his mother's responsibility, as is the case in many families.
3. Most young students in South Australian spend between two years and two terms and three years and one term as JP students, commencing with Reception, then moving to Year 1 and Year 2.
4. Dr Harry Nash, a paediatrician, has specialised in Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).
5. This school has an excellent Learning Assistance Program (LAP), where many helpers work voluntarily with students. However the resources of this program are in heavy demand, and many members of the community are too busy to participate.
6. This assessment was purchased at the considerable financial cost of $300, plus travel and two days' lost work as both parents needed to make the trip to Adelaide.
7. Adam is from a middle class family of Anglo-Saxon origin, thus these latter scores would be an accurate assessment.
8. The tutor lives a considerable distance in another direction from the town and so it is an hour drive each way for Sue, between her home, the school, and the tutor's home.
9. Department of Education and Children's Services
10. This information is as reported to me by Sue. I have not read the report.
11. This is a quotation of Sue taken from DECS text about the Basic Skills Tests.
12. SACE, the South Australian Certificate of Education, is the educational qualification it is hoped all students in South Australian will complete before leaving school.

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